



Early Methodism in Birmingham.



A MEMENTO OF THE
OPENING OF THE NEW
CENTRAL HALL, 1903.

"Shewing . . . the praises of the LORD and His strength
and the wonderful works that He hath done ; . . . that the
generation to come might know them . . . who should
arise and declare them to their children ; . . . that they
might set their hope in God."—*Psalm lxxviii.*

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EARLY METHODISM IN BIRMINGHAM.



A HISTORICAL SKETCH,

BY

W. C. SHELDON.

WITH INTRODUCTION BY REV. R. GREEN.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

BIRMINGHAM :

BUCKLER & WEBB LIMITED, ARGYLE WORKS, CHURCH STREET.

1903.

BW 73

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Wes. 93

INTRODUCTION.



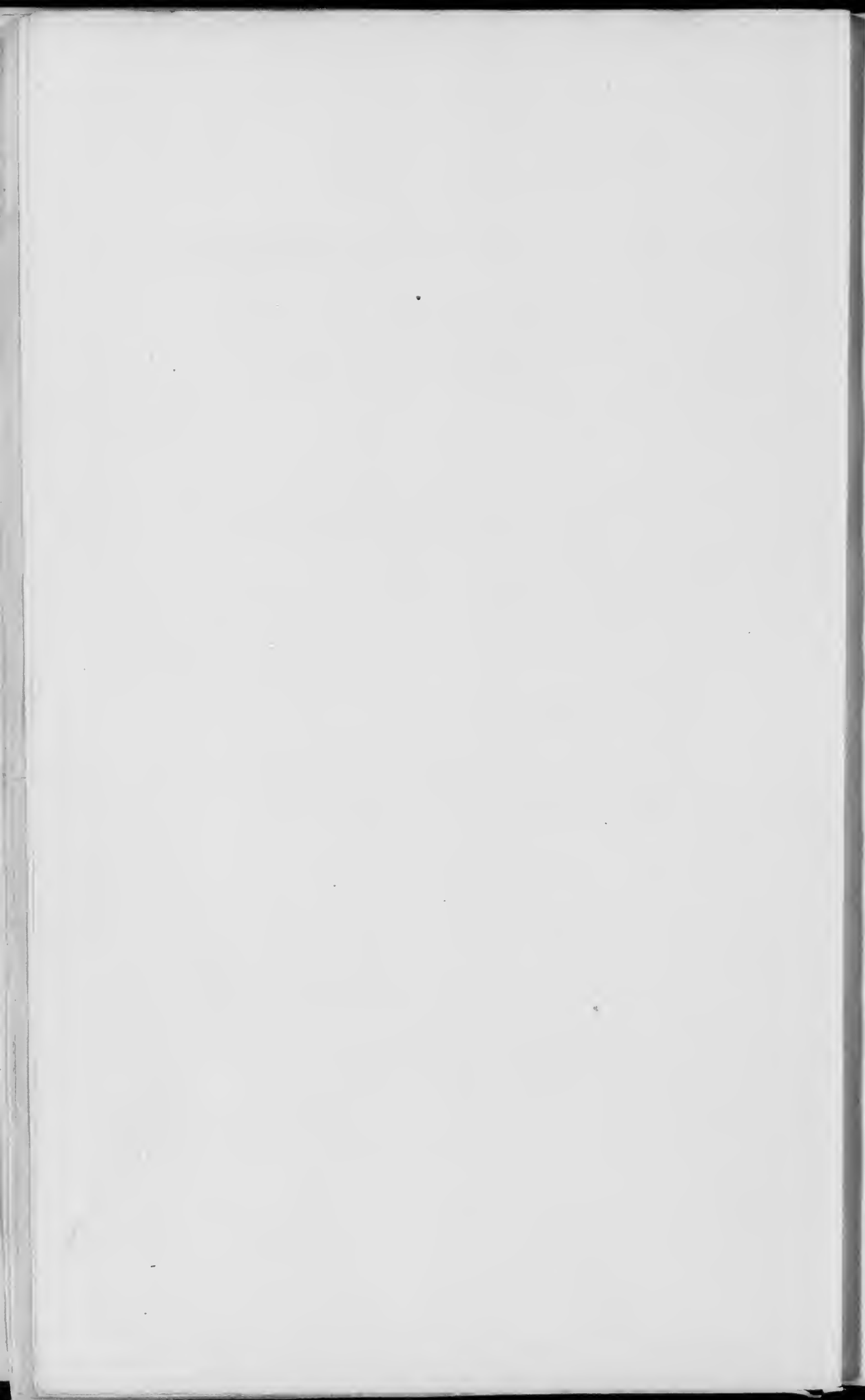
THE Opening of the New Central Hall marks an epoch in the history of Methodism in Birmingham. It is an impressive exhibition of the charitable zeal, the courage, the holy daring and the large-hearted liberality of our people—a liberality which was not exhausted by the noble work that signalized the opening of this Century.

The completion of this magnificent structure presents a most fitting occasion for a review of the planting and early development of Methodism in the town. To this review Mr. Sheldon has confined himself. In the following pages he has rendered a very great service, not only to the Mission of which the Central Hall is to be the focus, but to all who are interested in the work and progress of the Methodist Church; while he has made the way plain, by his enquiries, for all future workers in the same field of historical research. Mr. Sheldon has expended much time and patient labour in searching for documents and in verifying sites. In this he has been very successful. He has well traced from original authorities the history of Methodism through its first chapter; and he has prepared a very interesting record, that may be the basis of any fuller and more minute account—a record that cannot fail to be of the greatest service to the future historian. The history of Methodism in the Nineteenth Century remains yet to be written.

Only those who have experience in these matters can form a true notion of the amount of time and labour required for the discovery of hidden facts, many of which, when found, occupy but small space in their narration. Mr. Sheldon deserves the heartiest thanks for his work.

The Central Hall now stands as a token of our strong faith in the yet unfulfilled mission of Methodism; and, if we are true to the principles by which our fathers were guided, we may look upon this building not only as a fruit of the patient faith and diligent service of the past; but also as a pledge of yet greater achievements and richer harvests of blessing in the future.

R. GREEN.



Early Methodism in Birmingham.



*A HISTORICAL SKETCH.

BY

W. C. SHELDON.

THE completion and opening of the New Central Hall seems to present a fitting occasion for the setting forth of facts touching the introduction and early growth of Methodism in Birmingham.

Anything, and everything bearing on the subject has some interest, and that interest, perhaps, has never been more thoroughly aroused than at the present time. It is well that it is so; for the more fully we become acquainted with the persons and places, the difficulties and disasters, the courage and conquests of those early days, the more fully shall we realise the distance which separates the conditions of the 18th century from those of to-day, and the more completely shall we share in the grateful acknowledgment so often exclaimed by Wesley, "What hath God wrought!"

Not only is such a gathering of facts desirable, but there is a certain necessity for it; for they lie awaiting discovery in hundreds of books which are becoming scarce, and in traditions in hundreds of memories which also are gradually failing and becoming fewer. These fountains need discovering and tapping; but until this is done by some enquirer with the requisite qualifications and leisure, let the following stand as a contribution from one whose love for the subject is hand-in-hand with that for the object it is designed to serve.

The earlier notices of Birmingham by John Wesley are merely incidental to his passing through the town. On March 16th, 1738, he stayed for dinner on his way to Manchester with Mr. C. Kinchin, and another of whom we only know that his name was Fox, members with the Wesleys and others of the Holy Club, a gathering which first earned for its members the name of Methodist. On resuming the journey after dinner the party

* The leading points of this sketch, and many of the illustrations, appeared under a pseudonym in a series of articles in the *Methodist Recorder* in the year 1901. Non-essential matter in those papers is here omitted, but a large amount of new material is added.

was overtaken by a severe shower of hail, which Wesley took as a reproof for neglecting to exhort or instruct the attendants at the inn. On June 21st, 1743, he passed through on his way to Wednesbury to assist and encourage



THE OLD SQUARE.

(FROM WESTLEY'S MAP, 1731.)

(Lent by the publishers of "Old and New Birmingham.")

the sufferers in the terrible riots. On this occasion he must have slept in Birmingham, for he did not proceed till the following day; but there is no record of any preaching. He left Wednesbury on the 23rd (Thursday), for

Newcastle, by way of Nottingham. and at the latter town he met his brother Charles on Friday, who was on his way to Birmingham, on what proved a historic visit, nothing less than the establishment of a Methodist Society in Birmingham.

There is, however, a record of some previous activity to be found in "Some Papers giving an Account of the Rise and Progress of Methodism at Wednesbury . . . and other parishes adjacent," a tract of 30 pages printed "for J. Roberts in Warwick Lane [London] 1744," written anonymously, and clearly by no friendly hand. It is in three sections, the third being "An extract of another account of the Methodists: viz., at Birmingham," dated March 31, 1744. Here we learn "It is about two years since the first of this denomination made his appearance in Birmingham. His name was Ball. He held forth upon a little green at the Town's End call'd Gorstey Green, and had a numerous audience. . . . This gentleman proposed a collection for Building a Place of Worship (I think it was in Cambridgeshire). His proposal met with no encouragement, and he soon left Birmingham. It is very currently reported that not long after, he was committed to Gaol for some offence of a Civil Nature."

Who is "this gentleman" Ball? May he not have been the infamous Roger Ball, who, as we learn from Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, and elsewhere, "for years hung upon the skirts of the Methodist Societies" and plagued Wesley so much? Not improbably, for it is noticeable that the earliest mention of him by Wesley (*Journal*, March 23-24, 1746) is at Birmingham in connection with the Antinomian infection. "The same thing," he says, "that wretch, Roger Ball, affirmed in Dublin." May not the extended thought in Wesley's mind as to the introduction of the heresy have been somewhat thus:—Here I find the same teaching as in Dublin; Roger Ball affirmed it there, and the same man was here four years ago, working the same mischief. Of this visit of Ball's—though his name is not given—I find a paragraph in the Birmingham *Gazette* of Monday, May 10th, 1742, of which the following is an extract. It fixes the date, and it is confirmatory as to Cambridge. "On Thursday last, one of the Methodists (as they are term'd) appear'd in this place; he preach'd to a numerous audience from a common near the town. What success he met with he himself can only say. The following questions are proper to be answered:—(1) If a church be only two or three faithful people or more assembled in any place, what occasion is there for material buildings? (2) If not, what occasion for a new Church near Cambridge, where fields and highways are allowed? (3) If there is such occasion, whether the new church near Cambridge or Mr. Whitefield's Orphan House will be first erected?" There are three other queries directed to his teaching of the doctrine of Absolute Election, the last of which suggests that his proceeding is "directly opposite to what he promised at his ordination." This remark points to Ball having been an ordained clergyman. Not only was there no answer, but a letter published in the next issue (May 17) implies some personal appeal and refusal to answer. "The Queries published in your last paper by common report I find will receive no direct answer. The preacher to whom they are particularly addressed has declined the task in an ungenerous manner. If he has that disinterested concern for the welfare of mankind which he

expresses (but few believe) here is a field in which he may display his abilities. To challenge a person in a loose declamatory way may sound well to an ignorant populace ; but all discerning persons will easily see that this is only a cover for a retreat ; that the Methodist is hard put to it ; and that something must be said, or the Diana left in danger.—Yours, BRITANNUS.”

But we may be sure that this is not the account of the founding of the Methodist Societies in Birmingham. We must look for it in Charles Wesley's *Journal*.—“Sunday, May 22nd, 1743 : I preached to between one and two thousand people at Birmingham. I heard a miserable sermon to disprove the promise of the Father, by confining it to the Apostles. After the Sacrament I called on many ‘Repent, and be converted, for the promise is unto you &c.’ Several gentlemen stood in the crowd with signs of deep attention.” “Saturday, June 25th, 1743 : I came to Birmingham (from Nottingham) with the night. Sunday, June 26th : I preached at eight and one, no man forbidding me. After evening service I expounded the Prodigal Son to several thousands, many of whom, I observed, by their tears, were pricked to the heart, and ready to say ‘I will arise and go to my Father.’ In the name of the Lord Jesus I began our Society. The number at present is thirteen. Monday, June 27th, I left our brother Jones to look after the little flock, and set out for London.” The Roberts tract mentions these visits too, referring to the first named as on Whit Sunday, which accounts for the texts quoted. “Brother Jones” may be taken to be the James Jones of Wednesbury, and this is, I think, the earliest mention of his name in Methodist history. He is one of the deponents (June 29th, 1743) as to the riots there in that month, quoted in “Modern Christianity Exemplified at Wednesbury.” He afterwards had care of the Staffordshire Circuit several years, which then embraced Birmingham and extended into Gloucestershire ; he was present at the Conference of 1747, but afterwards ceasing to itinerate. He built at his own cost the first Methodist Chapel at Tipton Green (Atmore, *Memorial*, p. 228). On the morning of October 20th in the same year we find John Wesley meeting the little company and preaching to “a small attentive congregation,” before proceeding to Wednesbury—the morning of that eventful day when the mobs of Wednesbury and Walsall well nigh murdered him. On the 21st he and Charles again met at Nottingham, John looking (says Charles) “like a Soldier of Christ. His clothes were torn to tatters.” Charles was on his way to Birmingham, where on Monday, 24th, he “came weary and wet,” thence to Wednesbury. Before the Wesleys again see Birmingham it is visited by George Whitefield. Writing on December 31st, 1743, he says—speaking of some days previous—“I expounded to a great room full of people, who would rush into my room whether I would or not. On Sunday morning (Christmas Day) at eight, I preached in the street to about a thousand. I then went to church and received the Sacrament, and afterwards preached to several thousands in the streets.” He then ran over to Wednesbury, preaching in the evening and following morning, and by eleven o'clock was back in Birmingham preaching “to many thousands on a common near the town. The soldiers were exercising, but the officers, hearing I was come to preach, dismissed them, and promised that no disturbance should be made. All was quiet, and a blessed time we had.” He preached again at three,

rode on to Wednesbury, and back on Tuesday, preaching to "larger auditories than before, morning and afternoon (note the increasing congregations), and in the evening expounded in a large room twice, once to the rich and once to the poor and went to rest happier than the night before." He left the town on the next day amid the tears of the people, who shewed great concern at his departure. To this visit, which clearly created a great effect at the time, there is no reference in the contemporary "Gazette," nor can the rooms in which he preached be located; but as to the site the venerated John Angell James, in his "Protestant Nonconformity in Birmingham," refers to the site of the Ebenezer (Independent) Chapel in Steelhouse Lane as the spot traditionally reported to have been "consecrated by the labours of Whitefield, who somewhere in that neighbourhood once published the glad tidings of salvation," and this would doubtless be the occasion referred to. The "common near the town" may be pretty safely fixed at Gosta Green. The old maps shew this locality to have been a tract of commons bounded by the Stafford Road. Stafford Street has, in Westley's map of 1731, the alternative name of "The Butts," which easily suggests military exercises. Charles Wesley would pass Gosta Green on the two journeys just noted from Nottingham; and we have already seen that Ball preached in the same place in the year before. It was then beyond the verge of houses and buildings. The tract, already referred to, says great numbers flocked to hear Whitefield, who had been invited by a Dissenter. "Towards the last the auditors were not so numerous, and the behaviour of some of them not over civil. Soon after him (it continues) came a young man who was not in orders. He held forth but once, and then but for a very short time, being obliged by the treatment he met with to take into a house for security." At the beginning of February, 1744, a month after Whitefield, Charles Wesley is here again. He finds "a great door opened in this country, but there are many adversaries." He pays a visit to the brethren in South Staffordshire, and having "continued two days in the lions' den unhurt," returns to Birmingham on Saturday, February 4th. On Sunday "I preached in the Bull Ring close to the church, when they rang the bells and threw dirt and stones all the time. None struck me till I had finished my sermon. Then I got several blows from the mob that followed me, till we took shelter at a sister's." The Roberts tract adds "turnips" to the missiles, and is confirmatory as to date ("the Sunday before Lent"), locality, and the bell-ringing "which prevented him from being heard at any great distance," but puts the continuance of his preaching only "till the mob began to pelt him with dirt, turnips, &c." The Tract, which is dated March 31st, 1744, adds some general remarks on the results of these visits. The number of converts (it says) is not so numerous as at first apprehended; those that are "of the Established Church are very regular in their behaviour and in their attendance at church;" but "the Dissenters constitute the greater number, and are the greatest admirers, particularly of Mr. Whitefield." The writer "cannot find in Birmingham the strange unaccountable ecstasies" that characterised Wednesbury; and opines "that when once the Methodists have lost the Recommendation of Novelty they will dwindle to nothing at Birmingham, unless supported by those who have already without any just cause separated from our communion." A sapient forecast on which a sufficient comment will be found in



the fact that there are now eleven thousand church members of the various branches of Methodism and probably fifty-five thousand adherents in the Birmingham circuits. On May 10th following, John Wesley rides through Birmingham on his way from Evesham to Sheffield, and at a village three miles out (Erdington) he rebuked a poor man who was cursing and swearing at an "uncommon rate," but who "received it, drunk as he was, in great love; and so did all his companions." On February 6th, 1745, Whitefield records that W. Allt "exhorted twice at Birmingham with much freedom"; and later in the same month relates that Herbert Jenkins—a Welsh lay-preacher, who nevertheless is recorded by Wesley and Tyerman as preaching in places as widely separated as Plymouth and Edinburgh and Glasgow, in which latter place "he was complimented with the freedom of the city, and was entertained by the magistrates and by the presbytery"—reported a visit of four days, when "the people received the word with great affection and with many tears. The place where we met on Sunday night was so thronged that the candles went out; but the Lord made the place a Bethel to our souls."

On Sunday, May 6th, 1745, having preached at Tipton and (twice) at Wednesbury, Wesley "made haste to Goston's Green, near Birmingham, where I had appointed to preach at 6. But it was dangerous for any who stood to hear, [he is gloriously silent as to danger to himself] for the stones and dirt were flying from every side, almost without intermission for nearly an hour. However, very few persons went away. I afterwards met the Society, and exhorted them, in spite of men and devils, to continue in the grace of God." In the following February, he called on his way to Newcastle, devoting an afternoon and evening to the place, "where many of our brethren from several parts met us;" and on his way back, March 23-25, spent two days here. He preached on the Sunday evening, and had a tilt with one of the pillars of Antinomianism; and "that every serious person may see the true picture of Antinomianism full-grown" he "sets down the conversation, dreadful as it was, in the very manner in which it passed," and closes the account with "Surely these are the first born children of Satan"—language which is scarcely stronger than Robert Hall's characterisation of the heresy as "a thick skinned monster of the ooze and the mire, which no weapon can pierce, no discipline tame." The pestilential teaching of this lawless religion, as we learn from John Angell James, infected the Evangelical churches of Birmingham right through the century, diffused bitterness and strife among the people, and harassed and hindered the work of the pastors. Like Wesley and Hall, J. A. James speaks of it with vehement strength of language.

Hitherto we have notes of place of the preaching only, Gosta Green and the Bull Ring; but none of the meetings of the Society. John Angell James, says "it is probable that the place of meeting . . . was a private dwelling in the occupation of a Mr. Walker in Steelhouse Lane . . . This individual had been a man of immoral life, but being much impressed by Mr. Wesley's preaching, he said to his wife that . . . he should wish to let the people meet in his house. 'Well,' she replied, 'if they come here they must meet in the garret.' And for a time it is believed they did so." We have not only this tentative "belief" but some positive evidence that "they did so."

I am indebted to the venerable Rev. John Poulton, who entered the ministry from Birmingham in 1849, and is now enjoying the evening of a well-spent life at Harrow-on-the-Hill, for much trouble in bringing some facts to light. He has for a neighbour in the same little town Mrs. Smith, a lady of great age, the widow of an old Birmingham jeweller who formerly resided at Handsworth. She is a great grand-daughter of Mr. Walker, and gives an interesting account. She states that Walker was a Doctor or Surgeon (Dr. Thomas Walker), that he had known and come under the influence of Wesley



THE FIRST METHODIST PREACHING HOUSE IN BIRMINGHAM.

(RESTORED.)

(From a drawing by Mr. Ewen Harper.)

at Oxford, that he entertained Wesley on his first visit to Birmingham (by which doubtless is meant that of May, 1745, the first time he appears to have spent the night in Birmingham), and many times afterwards, and opened his house in Steelhouse Lane for preaching. A daughter of the Doctor was married to a Methodist named Wordsworth, who claimed kinship with the poet. Wesley nursed, and according to his habit, laid his hands in blessing on the head of their child Joseph Brettell Wordsworth, who was the father of Mrs. Smith, the narrator.

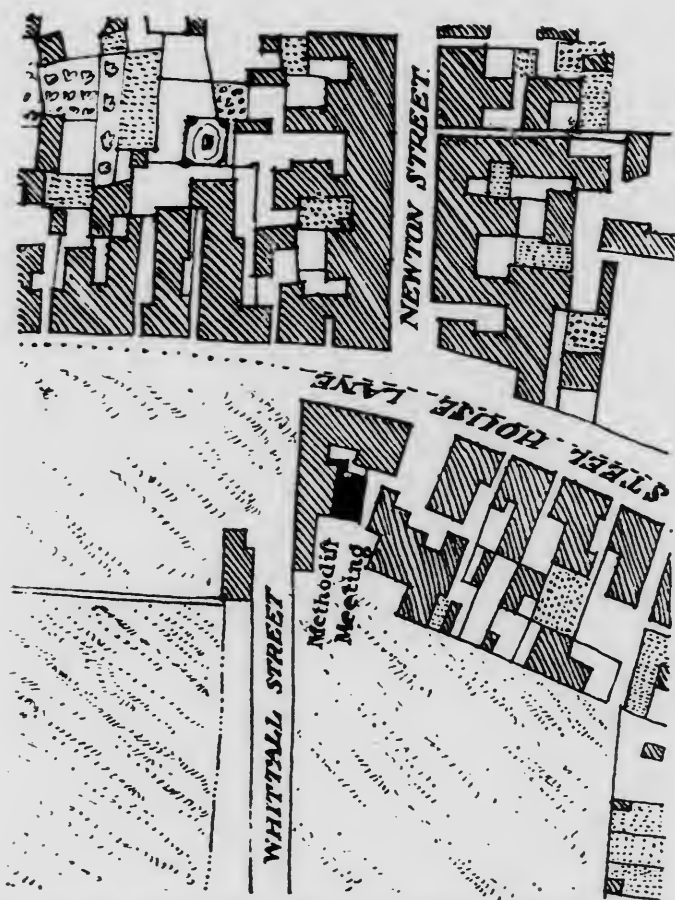
The name Wordsworth was corrupted in Birmingham to Wadsworth, and so appears in the directories of the end of the eighteenth century. We cannot pass over the name of Brettell in this connection without noticing an interesting chain of facts. Mrs. Walker, the hostess, was a Brettell, two of whose family, John Brettell, who was the first Methodist preacher Adam Clarke heard, about 1777, and Jeremiah, later entered the ranks of Wesley's preachers. It was another Brettell, probably a brother of the preachers, who entertained young Adam Clarke when passing through Birmingham on his momentous journey from Ireland in 1782, to obey Wesley's summons to meet him at Kingswood.

With this account of the Walkers, John Angell James's account is not inconsistent. "A private dwelling" is exactly what the house might be 150-160 years ago ; though not an imposing building as a dwelling house, it is more substantial than a shop would be likely to be at the very edge of the town, as it was at that time. "Had been a man of immoral life," does James say? Alas, that is not impossible, for not all are saints who are turned out of Oxford. Or the expression may be but a comparative one. But, happily, the impressions he received there from contact with Wesley were not effaced. Lying dormant they were awakened by the renewed contact, and brought forth fruit. And here he was, with open arms and open house ready to welcome Wesley. Indeed, he may have had some share in the invitation to him on May 6, 1745, when, as we have seen, he came by appointment. But what of the "garret"? It may have been seriously expressed ; but it is not inconceivably a wife's pleasant joke in playful and feigned deprecation of the husband's wish.

There is also a John Walker, salt dealer and huckster, of whom we shall see more later on, who is a possible candidate for the honour of opening his house for preaching. His name occurs so early and so often in the circuit records that it cannot be banished from the possibilities of the case, whereas the name of Dr. Walker does not so occur. On the other hand, we do not know that he lived in Steelhouse Lane, and there is a total absence of evidence such as I have cited in regard to the Doctor. The local directories do not commence till 1771, ten years after the preaching ceased in Steelhouse Lane, and they are silent both as to the doctor and the salt dealer.

However the fact may be as to the person, it is established that there was a preaching room there, on the silent testimony of a map of the town published in 1750, a section of which is here reproduced.

It will be noted that this map shows the "Methodist Meeting" to be a separate outbuilding rather than a garret; the fact, too, that it is specifically designated implies a separate, if not a detached, building, for a room forming part of the body of the house would scarcely be distinctively named. It seems clear therefore that the garret, if any, was antecedent to the room shown in the plan of 1750; but dates earlier than this are buried in oblivion. The building was a small lean-to structure about twenty-five feet long by fifteen wide, and nine feet high. The approach was by a passage from Steelhouse Lane, indications of which can still be traced. Nothing now remains but the back and end walls. It is now used as a shed, the front wall having been taken out and the roof slightly raised. The illustration is a result of a careful study of its lines, and shows it as it may be supposed to have appeared 150 years ago.



EXTRACT FROM BRADFORD'S MAP OF BIRMINGHAM, 1750. SHEWING
SITE OF THE FIRST PREACHING HOUSE.

In December, 1747, James Relly visited Birmingham, "and formed twenty or more into a Society, and on examining them was quite satisfied of the spirit of grace working in all their hearts." Does this imply a dwindling of the Society Charles Wesley had formed? Or a revival of it? Or was it a counter Society on lines which later led to his own wretchedness and ruin? We cannot tell. On July 29th, 1748, Wesley spent a few hours here on his way from Evesham to Nottingham, by way of Wednesbury. But he found time to preach, nor was he or his congregation deterred by the violent rain which continued a quarter of an hour. "This had long been a

dry, uncomfortable place (writes Wesley, on his next visit, November, 1749), so I expected little good. But I was happily disappointed. Such a congregation I never saw there before ; not a scoffer, nor a trifler, nor an inattentive person, and seldom have I known so deep, solemn a sense of the power, and presence, and love of God. The same blessing we had at the meeting of the Society, and again at the morning preaching. Will, then, God at length cause even this barren wilderness to blossom and bud as the rose?" If he could look down upon our work in such close proximity to the scene of his labours in those days, and witness the preparations now being inaugurated for a vast extension, with flourishing branches at Newtown Row, Bradford Street, and elsewhere,

how much greater cause would he have to sing his brother's lines :—

"When he first the work begun,
Small and feeble was his day ;
Now the word doth swiftly run,
Now it wins its widening way."

On Saturday, April 30th, 1751, Wesley rode to Birmingham, and found God in the "midst of the congregation," and on Sunday, "earnestly warned the Society against idle disputes and vain janglings," and afterwards preached on 'If ye be led by the Spirit,' &c. The hearts of many were melted within them ; so that neither they, nor I, could refrain from tears. But they were tears of joy. . ." We have no indication of the subject on which he felt it

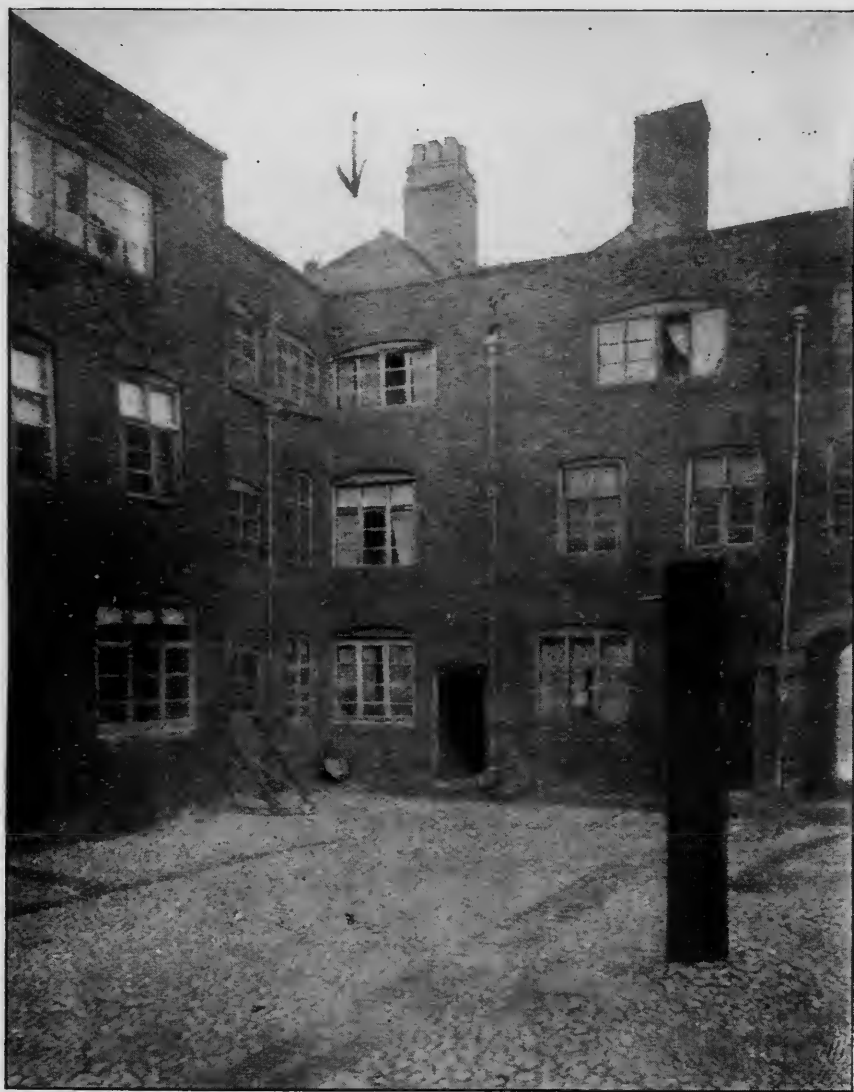


JOHN WESLEY AT THE AGE OF 47.

A COPY OF ROUBILIAC'S BUST.

(Photographed by Mr. J. G. Wright.)

necessary to utter so earnest a warning, but it may well have been the Antinomian trouble already referred to. At one o'clock he preached abroad, the room being too small by half, and adds, "Oh, how is the scene changed here! The last time I preached at Birmingham the stones flew on every side. If any disturbance were made now, the disturber would be more in danger than the preacher." Is he exact in saying "the last time?" Or does he refer to May 6th, 1745? There are the briefest references to preaching on November 11th, 1745, and June 18-20th, 1747, but no incident of any kind is mentioned.



**MR. NEWEY'S HOUSE, ANDERTON'S SQUARE, WHERE WESLEY STAYED
AND HELD A BAND MEETING.**

(From a Photograph by the Rev. W. H. Booth.)

There is a tradition preserved in the Newey family which gives a living touch to the account of these disturbances. I give it on the authority of

Mr. Poulton, who married one of the daughters. The Neweys seem to be of Flemish origin, and Protestant refugees to this country. After a time some settled in Wolverhampton, others in Birmingham, where one of them farmed land near the Cherry Orchard, whereon Cherry Street Chapel was afterwards built. One hundred and fifty years ago the family lived in a house in Anderton's Square, a court off Whittall Street, and they have been represented in the court continuously ever since. At one time seven of the houses in Anderton Court were occupied by Neweys. The surviving representative there is Miss Newey, now in her 70th year, a great-granddaughter of one of them, who very early threw in his lot with the Methodists. On several occasions Wesley stayed at his house, and his host suffered with him. Mr. Newey had set up a new coat in honour of his visitor, but it suffered severely from clods and mud and worse; so did Wesley's, and on their return to Whittall Street Mrs. Newey had no small trouble to make her husband and guest presentable again. But it ruined Mr. Newey's coat.

In July, 1751, Charles Wesley was here several days, preaching on Friday, the 12th, "to several of the better rank, who received the Word with a ready mind," and on Saturday "at morning and at noon my mouth was opened to make known the mystery of the Gospel." On Sunday he examined the Society and heard a good sermon at church, "but, alas! it supposed the congregations to be Christians." At five he "preached before Brother Bridgin's door, and expected a disturbance, but the power of the Lord was over all. The cloud stayed on the assembled Society . . . the Spirit helped us to pray, especially for some at Bristol, and our souls were like a watered garden."

Charles Wesley had just come from Bristol, where the Society had been sorely torn and distressed by the scandalous conduct of James Wheatley. He had not only sinned grievously, but also traduced his fellow preachers. Brought face to face with them, his wilful lying was manifest. The episode led to a strict examination into the life of every preacher. Charles was charged with the execution of this office, and the present journey was undertaken for that purpose. Wheatley was afterwards expelled, and was the first Methodist preacher on whom that punishment was visited.

The next morning at five Charles Wesley "took horse with our Brother Bridgin, an old disciple past 80," on his way to Yorkshire. This "old disciple" had been his travelling companion more than once before. He was a steel toy maker in Steelhouse Lane, and his business might occasionally take him to London. So in the previous October we find them travelling together from London by way of Oxford and Worcester. How much "past 80" is not stated, but in March, 1768, seventeen years later, John Wesley meets him, and speaks of him as "a venerable monument of antiquity in the 107th year of his age, who can still walk to the preaching, and retains his senses and understanding tolerably well;" and Hutton, the historian of Birmingham, includes him among his examples of longevity. The family name is met with in connection with Belmont Row Chapel at the turn of the century, and in 1807 Joseph Bridgens is trustees' treasurer there. His handwriting in the account book and the multi-columnar ruling of the book for classification of different heads anticipates modern accountancy. There is also a memorial sketch of his wife in the April Magazine of that year.

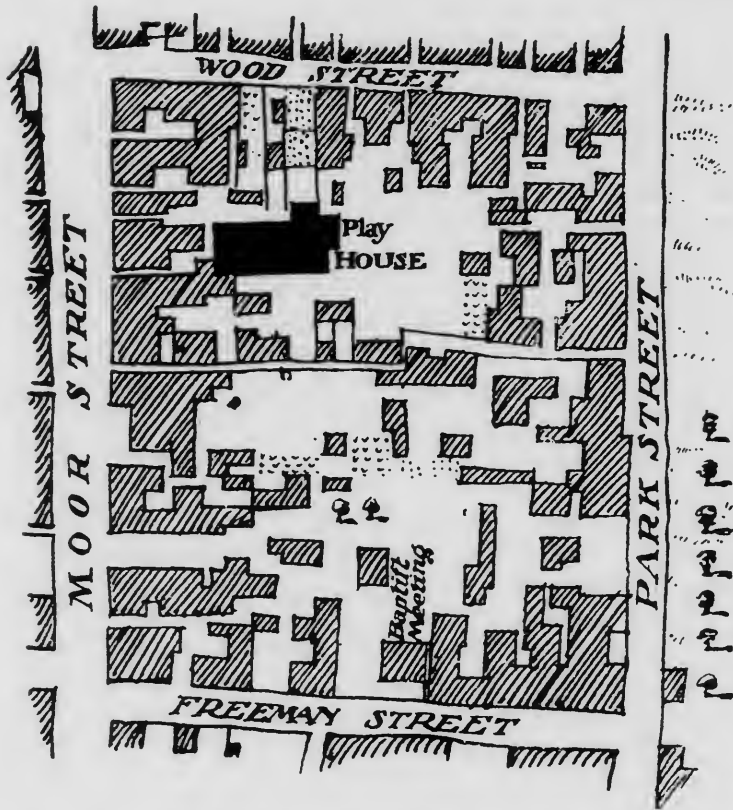
The little flock, as we have just seen, "expected a disturbance," and the threatened storm broke in the following October, when, as the local *Gazette* relates, "on Monday night an attempt was made on the Methodist Meeting in this town by some young thoughtless persons, who took from them the pulpit and many of the seats, and made a bonfire of them; but by the good management of the constables and some of the principal inhabitants they were in the morning dispersed." And here, by the way, the language again suggests something more than a garret. Thus quieted, Wesley finds peace and good behaviour on his next visit, March, 1752, when he spends two days here, and has "reason to hope that some of the seed which has been sown here will bear lasting fruit." A year later his soul is vexed by fresh disturbances, caused by a few poor Antinomian wretches—four men and two women—who were given up to the spirit of pride and blasphemy, and the *Journal* records a colloquy with their chief. In April, 1755, he finds the same trouble. The seed sown for so many years has been rooted up by the wild boars; the "fierce, unclean, brutish, blasphemous Antinomians, have utterly destroyed it; and the mystic foxes have taken true pains to spoil what remained with their new Gospel." No wonder he feels Birmingham to be "a barren, dry, uncomfortable place." Yet he is not in despair. "God has a blessing for this place still; so many still attend the preaching; and He is eminently present with the small number that is left in the Society." On Monday, September 20th, 1756, Charles Wesley pays his last recorded visit here; and soon after arriving "heard at the door Mr. I'Anson's voice. He brought life with him. As a Watchman of Israel, I warned the numerous audience of the sword coming. The word seemed to sink into their hearts," and "in conversing with several I conceived fresh hopes that they will at last become a settled people. Some who had forsaken us I received again." The name introduced in this quotation is of more than local interest. The head of the family, Sir Thomas I'Anson, resided at Newbounds, near Tunbridge Wells, and welcomed the visits of Wesley, who several times preached in his hall. To his brother Charles, too, he was equally a friend; the latter writes "I went to Mr. I'Anson's, and gave the sacrament to his family. Sir Thomas's love for me is beyond description, almost as vehement as poor J. Hutchinson's." The references to the family in the Journals of both John and Charles Wesley are numerous, and when "Mr." I'Anson is named it is often in a legal context. The widow of their friend, the Sir Thomas first named, died at Westminster, where also Bryan I'Anson lived. It was from "old Palis Yard" that he addressed an important letter to John Wesley, and it was from Mr. I'Anson's rooms, and probably in his company, or at least by his influence, that Charles Wesley witnessed the trial of Earl Ferrers in the House of Lords, on both days of the trial. All the circumstances that can now be ascertained point to his having been the legal adviser to the Wesleys for some years. What was the immediate business that brought him to Birmingham does not appear. His chaise kept pace with Charles Wesley the next day to Ashby, and the day following they visited Donnington Park together—the seat of Lady Huntingdon, after which he accompanied Wesley a few miles towards Nottingham, all which we may take as indicating a condition of personal as well as professional friendship.

In April, 1757, John Wesley still laments the havoc made by the mystics

and the Antinomians amongst this "once earnest and simple people," and "spoke to each member of the Society;" and three years later, April 4th, 1760, "he re-joined several who had long been separated from their brethren, and left upwards of fifty resolved to stand together in the good old path."

But what has the contemporary local journal to say all this time about these events and these men who were "turning the world upside down"? Not much. The newspaper was then in its infancy. Let the curious examine *Aris's Gazette* of that period, published on Monday morning. He will find it a small four-page sheet with a plenitude of ponderously worded advertisements, news from abroad with an account of the last battle, which had been fought some weeks before, news from London,—court and society, which seems always to have an attraction for the general reader,—Parliamentary, when the High Court is sitting, paragraphs reporting markets, sensational highway robberies, executions, monstrosities, announcements of marriage engagements, in which the sprightly Mr. A. is understood to be under a pledge to conduct at an early date to the Hymeneal altar the agreeable and beautiful Miss B. of — whose dowry is believed to require no less than three figures to express it; and so forth. There are no "leaders"; apparently there is no editor, the various matter being arranged and inserted by the publisher. Of public movements or meetings in the town there are very few, and so there is little to report and less to comment on. The entire local news, under the head "Birmingham," seldom exceeds half a column. The newspaper had not yet found its vocation. Perhaps few contrasts are more remarkable than that of the newspaper then and now. And so Wesley and Methodism are seldom noticed. Indeed, having by the courtesy of the late manager, Mr. Stenbridge, until his removal a local preacher in the Bristol Road Circuit, scanned every column of the *Gazette* of the 18th century, I have seen therein no other references up to the point we have now reached, than those noticed at the commencement. And so let us turn to Hutton. Ah! we shall find something there. So acute an observer could not let such a movement pass unnoticed. In the first edition of his "History of Birmingham" his notice is very brief. The fourth edition, 1819, devotes four pages to the subject. His attitude is not unfriendly; indeed, as a trustee and attendant for many years at Carr's Lane—though as to that his pastor's praise is but faint—his sympathies might be supposed to have some predisposition in favour of the evangelical work of the Methodists. He shews that all religious movements had had to encounter persecution. Of some this had been the making; others had gone under. This leads to, "The artillery of vengeance was pointed at the Methodists for thirty years; but, fixed as a rock, it could never be beaten down, and its professors now enjoy their sentiments in quiet. After the institution of this sect by George Whitfield (*sic*) in 1738, the Methodists of Birmingham were first covered by the heavens, equally exposed to the wind and the rabble; and afterwards they occupied, for many years, a place in Steelhouse Lane, where the wags of the age observed they were eaten out by the —" say fleas; that is bad enough. "They therefore procured a cast-off theatre in Moor Street where they continued to exhibit till —" but this is anticipating. We have not met elsewhere with such a reason for making the change, indeed there is a strong suspicion of Huttonian waggery, for he himself had a smart tongue.

On the contrary, let us offer a counter quotation on the subject of Birmingham and — (fleas.) Alexander McNab, an early Methodist preacher, writing at about the same period, says "Tuesday, September 1, I rode three miles to — a poor dead place. Next day came to —" (I am sure the places concerned will forgive my not naming them), "where I found a handful of people full of life and love of Jesus. In both places was teased with Fleas all night, so that I was glad of a night's rest at Birmingham," where he remained till Monday. After that let us hear no more of Hutton's fleas. Thank God, there was quite another cause for the change which he knew not of. In March, 1761, Wesley is more hopeful of growth in the Society, both in



EXTRACT FROM BRADFORD'S MAP OF BIRMINGHAM, 1750.
SHEWING SITE OF THE PLAY HOUSE, SECOND
PREACHING HOUSE.

spirit and in numbers. He finds "the room . . . far too small . . . many flocked together at five in the morning, and far more than the room would contain in the evening." Let us turn to Alexander Mather, then a young man of 27, at the outset of his long and remarkable ministry. "In 1760 I came to Staffordshire [Birmingham being within the circuit] "and we had a great outpouring of the Spirit . . . In one night it was common to see five or six (sometimes more) praising God for His pardoning mercy. And not a few in Birmingham . . . clearly testified that the blood of Jesus Christ had cleansed them from all sin." . . . Afterwards "the Societies increased greatly; . . . in Birmingham we hired a large building. Satan was alarmed at this, and stirred up outward persecution . . . but it did us no hurt. Our brethren went on, not counting their lives dear unto themselves." Hutton was at least right in saying "fixed as a rock, it could never be beaten down;" and with a spirit and ministry such as Mather exerted its security will remain.

The building here referred to was a theatre in a court leading from Moor Street to Park Street, disused through the erection of another theatre elsewhere.

spirit and in numbers. He finds "the room . . . far too small . . . many flocked together at five in the morning, and far more than the room would contain in the evening." Let us turn to Alexander Mather, then a young man of 27, at the outset of his long and remarkable ministry. "In 1760 I came to Staffordshire [Birmingham being within the circuit] "and we had a great outpouring of the Spirit . . . In one night it was common to see five or six (sometimes more) praising God for His pardoning mercy. And not a few in Birmingham . . . clearly testified that the blood of Jesus Christ had

The south end of Moor Street is one of the oldest parts of the town ; indeed, Hutton goes so far as to say "perhaps the south end is two thousand years older than the north." Its name was "anciently Mole Street, from the eminence on one side or the declivity on the other." In the 16th century it was Molle Street ; but though only a few hundred yards from the Bull Ring, our site in Westley's map of 1731 is shewn to be surrounded by fields, gardens, and trees, and marked "Land for Building" ; and only a few detached houses fronting the street are shewn north of it. The building was erected in 1740, and was therefore but 22 or 23 years old when the Methodists hired it. Here Wesley preached on two successive evenings in June, 1763. Travelling from Stockport he brought with him Matthew Mayer, the well-educated son of a farmer. Though young (23), Mayer had long been shaping for Christian work amongst the poor, and he and a friend are believed to have been the first to establish the weekly public prayer meeting as a regular feature of Methodist work. But, though apt at speaking and of good understanding and winning manners, he had never ventured to address any but small gatherings. His conduct and abilities won Wesley's confidence, and on going to the preaching house on the last of the two evenings, Wesley said, "Brother Mayer, you must preach in the morning at five o'clock." He objected, "Sir. I cannot ; I have never preached but in small houses." "Fear not," replied Wesley, "the Lord will help you. I must be off in the morning before five o'clock and take brother Newhall with me, and I desire you to take his circuit for a week." Without further ceremony, Wesley announced him to preach at five o'clock next morning. We are told of the sleepless night, of the feeling of loneliness and helplessness and responsibility. But "the Lord will help you." He worked the circuit for a week, preaching night and morning, and was graciously helped therein, yet not knowing when one sermon was finished where to look for the next text. But he left behind him "more than twenty persons who professed to be brought into the liberty of the children of God, and many more who were truly awakened. . . ." Thus began a career of singular usefulness and success which as a local preacher he pursued with energy and devotion many years, chiefly in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire.

Hutton, with characteristic levity, speaks of the "Methodist Meeting-house, where, it was said, though it changed its audience it kept its primeval use, continuing the theatre of farce." Is this record of Mayer's a "farce"? Would there were more farces of the same quality.

Wesley was here again in March, 1764, and had "an exceeding large congregation. . . Happy would it be if all the playhouses in the kingdom were converted to so good a use. After service the mob gathered, and threw some dirt and stones at those who were going out. But it is probable they will soon be calmed, as some are in the gaol already. A few endeavoured to make a disturbance the next evening during the preaching ; but it was lost labour ; the congregation would not be diverted." These disturbances are spoken of by Alex. Mather too, who writing in 1780 a retrospect of events in the circuit, commencing in 1760, and extending probably over several years, says :—"In 1763 God revived His work . . . especially at Birmingham, notwithstanding the disturbance which we constantly had

during the preaching, and the danger of being murdered by the mob when we came out of the house. No magistrate could quell the rioters; or rather, I should say, none would. For it is certain any magistrate has power to preserve the peace if he will. But at length, Mr. Wortly Birch took them in hand; he laid some of the rioters in the dungeon, and left them there a night or two to cool. He fined the rest according to law; obliged them to pay the money down, and gave it to the poor. By this means their stout spirits were humbled, and we have had peace ever since."

Nicolas Manners, who entered the circuit in 1766, gave a circumstantial account of what appears to be the same outbreak. The troubles were so severe that the Sunday afternoon services in winter had to be held at one o'clock instead of five. The persecutors, unaware of the alteration, went at the usual time, and finding the doors closed, broke them open and did much damage. On the next day the bell-man was sent round, offering a reward of two guineas for information leading to conviction. One of the offenders, being apprehended, impeached nine others, and all ten were brought before the magistrate. "He told them he could send them all to prison, and if they did not pacify their prosecutors he would do it; and as much damage had been done at different times he ordered them to pay the Methodists ten guineas. Nor would he permit them to depart till they had paid the money. He said if they came before him again they should not escape so easily. This being reported in the town put a stop to the persecution, and we could preach when we pleased." There was no recurrence up to 1768, when Wesley writes, "the tumults which subsisted here so many years are now wholly suppressed by a resolute magistrate"; nor up to 1777, when Thomas Taylor was first appointed to the circuit, and found the fiery experience so burnt into the memory of the people that it comes uppermost in his record:—"Birmingham . . . had for many years been very turbulent by reason of the mobbing rabble; but at length an honest justice let them know their place, so that we have peace now." But who was this "resolute magistrate," this "honest justice," who, in an age when justice to the Methodists was at a premium, gave relief to the oppressed and persecuted, and won for himself an honour which will remain so long as these records stand? The contemporary *Gazette* fails to disclose either the name or the prosecution, or even the occasion of it. The name given by Alex. Mather has puzzled earnest and expert enquirers for a long time. Writing after probably a long interval he might have forgotten the exact name; or he might be unfamiliar with the written spelling, hearing it probably only in a colloquial way, and from uneducated lips. But let us here for the first time extricate him from oblivion so far as Methodist records are concerned, and proclaim him as Mr. John Wyrley Birch, of Hamstead Hall, owner of large estates at Handsworth, Perry, and Witton, of which latter manor he was the lord. He was the son of Rev. Peter Birch, D.D., prebendary of Westminster, and was buried at Handsworth Church in 1775, at the age of sixty-eight. The Birches gave name in the previous century to Birchfield and Birch's Green, and Sir Thomas Birch, Justice of the Common Pleas, who died in 1757, and his younger brother, John, rector of Handsworth, were members of the same

family. Wyrley was the family name of our magistrate's mother. Mather may well be excused the mis-spelling, for the present head of the family writes me, "I am not at all sure that I have not myself been addressed as Wortley among the many variations of the word that I have come across." These qualifications, however, belonging to the County of Stafford, would not empower him to adjudicate in Birmingham; but this right he derived through the acquisition of lands in Bordesley, Saltley, Edgbaston, and, through his mother, in High Street and Dale End. Thus he was amply qualified. He was a strong magistrate, and Hutton points out that smaller places "find employment for half-a-dozen magistrates, and four times that number of constables; whilst the business of this was for many years conducted by a single justice, the late John Wyrley, Esq.;" and he smartly adds, "if the reader should think I am mistaken, and object that parish affairs cannot be conducted without a second, let me reply he conducted that second also."

To return to the Playhouse. This translation from playhouse to preaching-house excited the mirth of the worldlings, and John Freeth—the local "Poet Freeth," one of a convivial coterie of advanced politicians—made the event the occasion for a series of verses:—

ON A PLAYHOUSE BEING TURNED INTO A METHODIST MEETING HOUSE.

I sing not of battles, nor sing of the State,
But a strange metamorphose that happen'd of late,
Which if the comedians of London should hear,
Who knows—it may put the whole body in fear.

Where dancing and tumbling have many times been,
And plays of all kinds by large audiences seen,
These wicked diversions are not to be more,
Poor Shakespeare is buffeted out of the door.

The story is true, the tale it is strange,
And people might well be alarm'd at the change;
Instead of a Dryden, a Johnson, or Lee,
You nothing but purest devotion can see.

Behold, where the sons of good humour appear'd,
The scenes are thrown down and a pulpit is rear'd;
The boxes on each side converted to pews,
And the pit all around naught but gravity shews.

The music's sweet sound, which enliven'd the mind,
Is turn'd into that of a different kind;
No comic burletta or French rigadoon,
But all join together and chant a psalm tune.

When told that fam'd W—l—y appear'd on the stage,
The grave ones began to reflect on the age;
But those in the secret approv'd of the case,
For 'twas done to drive Satan away from the place.

If through the land this example should take,
A strange reformation it surely would make;
All writings dramatic would certainly cease
If COVENT and DRURY should take the disease.

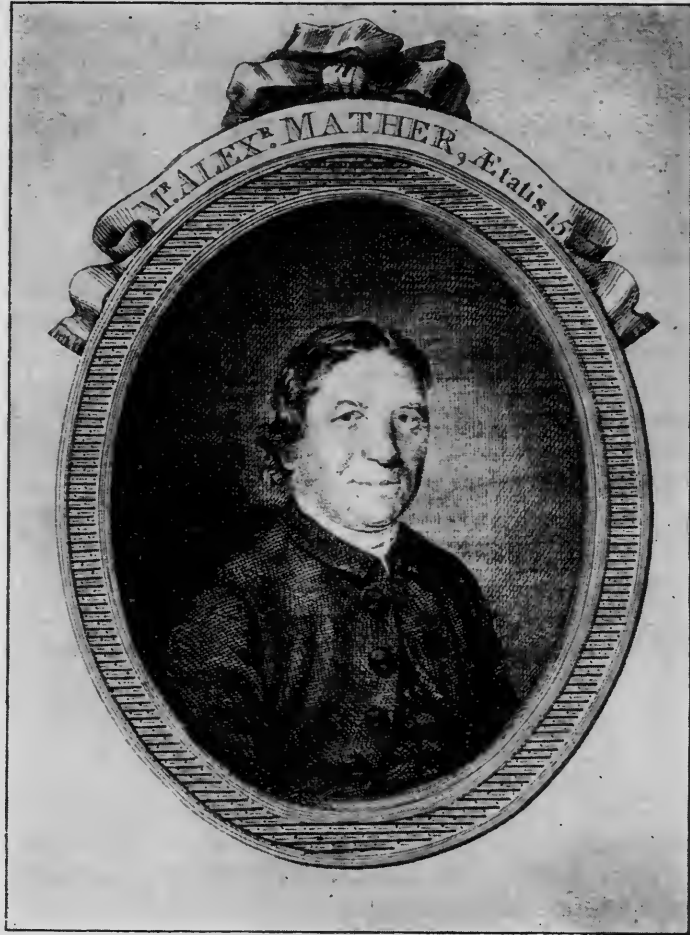
Derry down, Derry down, &c., &c.

But Wesley had some good times in the place. In August, 1765, he found a large congregation awaiting him, and "applying those comfortable words 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it,' I soon forgot my weariness and the heat of the place; God was there, and it was enough." In the following March "the mob gathered, but they were restrained till I had concluded," and in March, 1770, "the people were wedged in as close as possible" [on Saturday evening], and the same congregation the next morning. On this occasion Wesley was accompanied by John Hilton, a man of above the average ability amongst his preachers, but who entertained views which led him to unite with the Society of Friends. Wesley was joined here also by Thomas Rankin, who accompanied him thenceforward on the present tour. It was here, too, in the March of 1773, that Rankin came to receive his last instructions from Mr. Wesley on his appointment to an important mission to America. He says, "The interview was pleasing and affecting, as well as instructive, which I hope to remember till my latest breath." There is a touching incident of the same period recorded of Matthias Joyce in the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, in which Birmingham figures. Joyce, apprenticed to a printer in Dublin, ran away from his master, and the entreaties of his aged father were unavailing to restrain him. Two days' sail brought him to Liverpool, and four days' walk to Birmingham, where his brother-in-law in the same trade secured him employment. Five months later he told a fellow-Irishman, who had come to work with him, of his escapade, for which he reproved him sharply. The reproof entered his heart, and caused him to return to his old master. His hardships on the return journey were heart-rending. After a period of headstrong sin he was awakened under Wesley's preaching, and afterwards became an earnest and useful preacher of the Gospel.

Hitherto we have seen nothing of matters financial in connection with this poor and despised Society. The materials are scanty, but at this period there are a few notes of interest which show "how small and feeble was their day." The earliest authentic account of the finances is 1767, when the circuit comprehended Wolverhampton on the north, and Worcester, Gloucester, Cheltenham, and Stroud to the south-west. The aggregate contribution to the circuit-board for the quarter was £19 8s. 3d., the Birmingham amount being £2 12s. 6d. Two years later the total was £27 9s. 2d., the Birmingham contribution being £2 15s. 9d. The amounts gradually increase, and in 1782, when Cherry Street Chapel was erected, it reached £6 4s. 6d. The payments were on the same scale of painful poverty. At first the preacher's quarterage was £3, and his wife's £2 10s. The house rent was £1 1s., and there are some sundries which have a quaint sound in present-day ears. Here are a few:—"A letter from Mr. Wesley, 5d.;" "Mr. Pawson's turnpikes, 12s.;" "For Nancy, the servant, 5s.;" "Mrs. Glover, for washing Mr. Mather's two shirts, 4d." There is an entry of £1 8s. for a saddle for Mr. Hanby, with an explanatory note, "which was stole out of the stable at Wednesbury." The cost of sending three preachers to Conference was 12s. 10d. each, "making an even balance" of the account, shewing that the payment was not what the journey cost, but what they had in hand. It required much painful ingenuity to keep out of

debt. Alexander Mather tried to improve the finances of the circuit, and made a special collection at the principal places which yielded £5 12s. 1d., and writes, "after much begging and a good deal of insult . . . I have brought the book to this balance of 2s. ; wishing my successor may do better, and guard against those who are apt to make divisions, I remain, ye servant of the Circuit, Alexander Mather." His successor was Thomas Taylor, who in the following July appends a note to the accounts, "so

there remains three-pence to carry us to Conference!" Brave Alexander Mather! a man of good parentage and education, whose abilities would have won distinction in professional and public life. But "the great salvation" fastened hold on him, and to its proclamation and the building up of the church his great powers were devoted. When, on offering himself for the work, Wesley warned him that "the Methodist preachers often fared hard, were often in want, were liable to be stoned, beaten and abused in various manners," he replied "that he did not regard what he suffered in doing the will of God." His life did not belie that declaration. He was



ALEXANDER MATHER.

(Photographed by Mr. J. G. Wright, from a Magazine portrait.)

one of the leaders and statesmen of Methodism, "a man of commanding sense, courage, and dignity." Wesley in his later years relied on his counsels, and ordained him by the imposition of hands to the office of Superintendent or Bishop, with power to administer the sacraments. Thirty years ago Birmingham Methodism in the Wesley Circuit had the ministrations of his descendant, Rev. George Mather.

And brave old Thomas Taylor, too! His hardships of hunger and cold were above many. He lost for a time his speech and hearing, and almost

his life, through being put into damp beds. It was said of him that a few stout mobs and downright persecutions suited him better than mere vexatious trials. He was the last man to be daunted by having only "threepence to carry him to Conference." His long ministry of more than ordinary ability and energy was inspired by a passion for the conversion of sinners and the building up of the Church. What cared these men for poverty! Let these stand as examples of a noble band of men who counted not their lives dear to them that they might win souls, men who helped to make Methodism; the success of whose labours is our inheritance to-day.

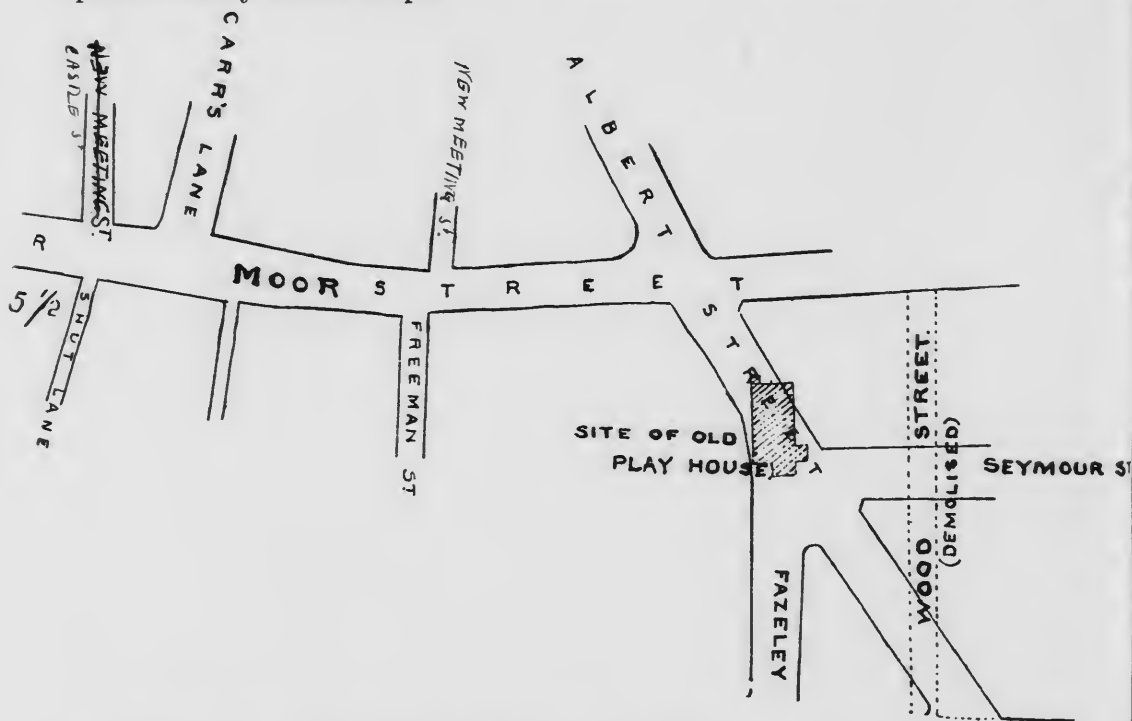
But though the Methodists of that day were poor, they hated debt, and in 1770 won Wesley's commendation in the "Minutes." For some years the connexional debt had been growing. At the Conference of 1766 the "total debt for building" is reported at £11,383, and after the comment "we shall be utterly ruined if we go on thus," measures for its reduction are recorded, and repeated in 1767 1768-69 shew substantial reductions; but in 1770 "we gain no ground . . . how can we prevent its further increase?" Among the answers is, "2. Let each Assistant encourage the people in each place, like those in Birmingham, to make a push towards paying off their own debt." We have no record of what, exactly, this means—what the debt was, and how incurred. The place was held at an annual rent of £5 4s. 4d.; but doubtless there had been a capital expenditure in fitting it up for the purposes of religious worship. But the sense is plain; they "made a push to clear off their own debt." The same Conference, 1770, helped them in their valiant effort by voting the sum of £32 15s. 6d., an odd figure which appears like clearing off the balance. Further, the legal documents relating to the property, from the time the land was Kimberley's Croft, in the pre-theatre days, to the end of the Methodist tenure, which I have been privileged to see, disclose that in the following February, 1771, the trustees took the bold step of purchasing the lease, which then had 67 years to run, for the sum of £145, subject to a ground-rent payable to the trustees of King Edward's Grammar School, of twelve shillings per annum. And the document recites that they had raised this sum by subscriptions amongst themselves and friends who were well disposed to their work, and by collections at their services. Here again there is a grant from the Conference of 1772 of £10 to assist their enterprise. Let us put on record the names of the brave men who took this business in hand. John Walker, huckster and dealer in salt. Can you imagine him pushing a handcart laden with salt, blowing a tin trumpet, and crying "salt! salt!" Ah, but he was seasoning the moral and religious life of Birmingham. Though his calling was the humblest and least reputable on the list, his name is the first, and we may be sure he was to the front in these matters. Perhaps, after all, he was the Walker who twenty years before opened his house for Methodist preaching in Steelhouse Lane. We have already shewn the uncertainty of the point. Then follow, Joseph Heath, painter; Joseph Lord, smith; Edward Wilks, button-maker; John Linacre, breeches-maker; Benjamin Redding, button-maker; John Southwell, book-keeper; Thomas Jones, book-keeper; and Joseph Amos, hinge-maker. All poor men and small tradesmen, with no members of Parliament, city councillors, professional men, or large manufacturers amongst them:—just the tent-makers and carpenters and fishermen of Birmingham. Let us honour these men in the hour of our prosperity to-day.

There is a tradition in the family of Mr. R. K. Dent, whose historical works on Birmingham are a monument of industrious and painstaking research, who is of an old Methodist family, society steward and trustee at Lichfield Road, that about this period Wesley preached from the steps of the then newly-erected Canal Company's office in Paradise Street. This tradition bears the mark of probability; for the town was then rapidly extending towards Edgbaston, and the new canal would bring a large number of boatmen, wharf attendants, carters, and others into the neighbourhood, in addition to the population of the newly-formed streets surrounding it.

Thomas Taylor, to whom reference has already been made, in his reminiscences written later, speaks of the old playhouse:—"We were cased up in an old shabby building in an obscure dirty back street; but soon after our going out of doors a large new chapel was built, and since that two more." This, however, was not accomplished during his appointment; but clearly he was the man who set the ball rolling at the Conference of 1778 when his appointment ended. The question was raised, and the minute is encouraging:—"Try if anything can be done at Birmingham." But the time was not yet. He speaks of out-door preaching as a "happy means of increasing this blessed work," an experience and means which we may be thankful has not died out, as witnessed by striking testimony at the last Conference. He specially refers to a sermon afterwards printed and "much read," delivered in "a large square called The New Market." New Market square has long vanished, but a short street leading from Great Charles Street to Bread Street (now Cornwall Street) preserves the name. It appears, too, from the memoir of Elizabeth Cartwright, in the magazine of October, 1824, that about 1780, "Dr. Coke visited Birmingham and preached by the wall of a timber yard opposite her father's house in Bread Street," which led to her conversion. This entry suggests quite a string of interesting associations. One of her sons, Mr. Alexander Cartwright, was a well known medical practitioner in Steelhouse Lane, who, with his partner, Mr. Joseph Ward, a local preacher and class leader, are remembered by the older generation of living Methodists. Mr. Ward succeeded Mr. Cartwright in residence in Steelhouse Lane, when the latter removed to Hockley. Their junior partner, Dr. Vinrace, now resides at Moseley. Mrs. Cartwright's maiden name was Mason; but there was another Elizabeth Mason, her cousin, born seventeen years later, 1780, who became the wife of Rev. Richard Waddy, and the mother therefore of Dr. Waddy, M.D., of Edgbaston, of the famous Rev. S. D. Waddy, D.D., sometime President of Conference, and of Rev. B. B. Waddy. Nor is this all. It was from this family of Mason that the Rev. John Mason sprang, the well-known Book Steward who ruled at the Conference office, 1827-1863.

This mention of Dr. Coke recalls a later visit of that pioneer missionary, which was big with results, for it influenced the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society. At the end of the 18th century the pastor of the Baptist chapel in Cannon Street was Rev. Samuel Pearce, a spiritual grandson of Edward Burn, curate to John Riland, the first vicar of St. Mary's, and afterwards vicar himself. Having met with Carey, he became touched with the missionary spirit; but it was a sermon by Dr. Coke that fanned it into a flame. Writing October 8th, 1794, he says, "I do not remember any wish for foreign service till, after a residence [in

Birmingham] of some months, I heard Dr. Coke preach at one of Mr. Wesley's chapels, from 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God.' Then it was that I felt a passion for missions. Then I felt an interest in the heathen world far more deep and permanent than before." He plunged into the formation of organisations at home, but his ardour was unsatisfied by anything less than personal service in India, for which he offered himself. The committee, however, felt that his power to influence others at home could not be sacrificed. He died before the century was out, at the age of thirty-three. But to return to Wesley, and to the old playhouse once more. Wesley paid several further visits to Birmingham, having but touch-and-go entries in his *Journal*. "Another comfortable opportunity with our friends in Birmingham" (March 1781) is the most extended entry till July 6th, 1782, when he "came to Birmingham and preached once more in the old dreary preaching-house" for the last time. The next day (Sunday) he opened Cherry Street chapel.



SITE OF PLAY HOUSE IN MOOR STREET, SHEWING ITS RELATION TO THE
STREETS OF TO-DAY.

(From a Plan supplied by the City Surveyor.)

The playhouse and a considerable area around and beyond it, together with Wood Street, shewn in the map on p. 20, have been swept away. The legal documents already referred to include an agreement to sub-lease the property to Edward Wilson, at an annual rental of £7 12s. 0d., upon condition that he should take the building down; and the deed relates that he did take it down. The site is intersected by the present Albert Street. If any desire to see what the old court and its surroundings were like, let them penetrate into the neighbouring courts

which still remain—containing extensive stabling and coach-houses, reminiscent of the old coaching days,—narrow, dark, and dismal alleys, but vivid replicas of the “cased-up old shabby buildings” described by Thomas Taylor. And in such holes was the religion of our forefathers nourished and fed ; but “God was there, and it was enough,” more than which cannot and need not be said of our ornate temples of to-day.



A COURT IN MOOR STREET STILL EXISTING.

THE COURT CONTAINING THE PLAY HOUSE, AFTERWARDS USED AS A PREACHING HOUSE, WAS OF THE SAME CHARACTER.

(From a Photograph by Rev. W. H. Booth.)

The Building on the left in this view was also a theatre, and occasionally used for religious services by Rev. James Caughey and others. It has, therefore, been assumed to be the Methodist Preaching House of the Eighteenth Century. This is a mistake, as will be seen from the text and plan on p. 28.

And now we have Wesley preaching for the last time in the old theatre on Saturday, and opening the new house at eight on Sunday morning.

It held the people then but not in the evening, when many were constrained to go away. A bench on which some stood broke with a huge noise, creating a temporary panic, "but in a few minutes all was quiet." The account of the opening, given in the local *Gazette* of Monday, July 8th, may be quoted in full:—"Yesterday the new Meeting House in Cherry Street in this Town was opened by the Rev. Mr. John Westley with an excellent discourse, to a genteel and very numerous congregation. He took his text from I. Cor. i. 23-24, 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the



CHERRY STREET CHAPEL, AFTER ENLARGEMENT IN 1822.

Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.'"

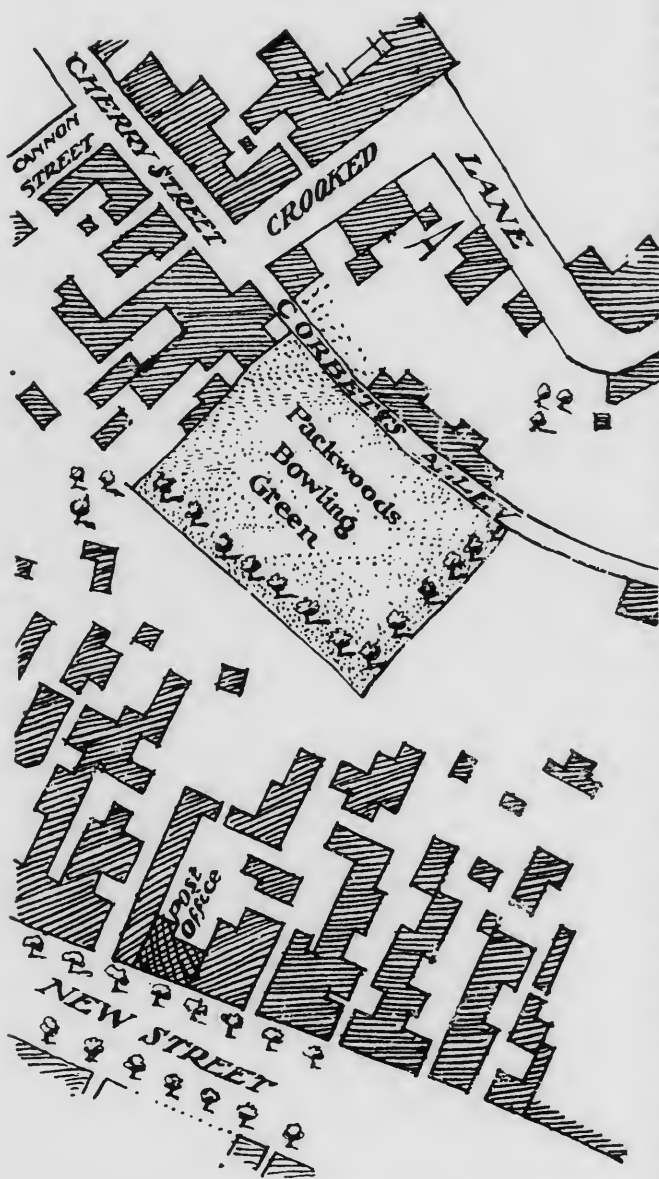
Wesley's account of the "huge noise" is correct; but sinister reports having got abroad, the *Gazette* of the following Monday, July 15th, published the following paragraph of reassurance:—"A Report having prevail'd that the Gallery, or some part of the New Meeting House in Cherry Street in this

town, gave way on Sunday, the 7th inst., we are desired to inform the Public (as well for their Satisfaction as for the Credit of the Builder) that the Alarm

which happened arose merely from the breaking of a Carpenter's Bench, on which too great a Number of Persons stood; and that there is not the smallest Failure in any part of the Building. To Prevent future Fears it may be proper to remark, that the gallery is supported by Iron Pillars, 6 Inches in Diameter, and the whole planned and executed in so good a Manner, that several Builders and competent Judges have acknowledged it to be one of the firmest Buildings of the Kind in the Kingdom."

Wesley spent the succeeding week in and about Birmingham, visiting Boulton and Watts' great engineering works, Hagley Park, the seat of the Lytteltons and the Leasowes in the same neighbourhood, where William Shenstone lived and died; in all of which, his observation and interest were wide awake, as they ever were in contemplating the works of nature or of art. Except that he read prayers and preached in the church at Darlaston on Wednesday, there is no mention of any preaching or meeting of the Society during his stay; but on the Sunday following (the 14th) he "heard a sermon in the old church which the preacher uttered with great

vehemence against these hair-brained itinerant enthusiasts." "But he totally missed his mark," writes Wesley, "having not the least con-



EXTRACT FROM BRADFORD'S MAP OF BIRMINGHAM,
SHEWING SITE AND SURROUNDINGS OF
CHERRY STREET IN 1750 *

* The three extracts from Bradford's Plan of 1750 are pen-and-ink enlargements of the original, executed by Messrs. Crouch and Butler, architects. Unnecessary details in the original buildings, gardens, grass plats and so forth, are left blank in the copies; but every essential is faithfully and accurately reproduced.

ception of the persons whom he undertook to describe." The old man's equanimity is not at all disturbed by hard words. We may take it that he preached in the "new house" on this day too; but the record is silent.

Here again we are in a back street. High Street, outside the area of this map, and New Street were, as now, two of the principal streets, though the eastern end of the latter was then the Swine Market, blocked up by buildings, leaving only a narrow passage into High Street, similar to that by which Castle Street still opens into High Street. Crooked Lane ran into the former near its junction with Bull Street. Access to New Street was by way of Cannon Street, where stood the Baptist chapel to which reference has been made. In a map of 1731 the area is shewn to have been occupied by cherry orchards. The chapel was at the inner angle, A, of the street variously called Little Cherry Street and Crooked Lane. Corbett's Alley is now Union Street. The famous Union Passage,—uniting New Street with Bull Street, and intersecting Crooked Lane at its second bend—was not then thought of; and in another sense it is not very much thought of now, for the new Corporation Street has completely cold-shouldered it. It entered New Street near the Post Office shewn in the map, exactly opposite to King Edward VI.'s grammar school.

In March, 1783, Wesley is here once more. For some weeks he had been "far from well;" a cold, with a deep tearing cough, fever, nervous system violently agitated, continual cramp, and exhaustion. This is a catalogue of his symptoms. On Sunday, 23rd, he procured a friend to electrify him thoroughly, several times in the day; and "in the evening ventured to preach three-quarters of an hour and found no ill effect at all." Again, in September he preached "and had a comfortable season;" and again in March and August, 1784. On Good Friday, 1785, he is here again. "A sharper frost I never knew, but our house was hot enough in the evening; and I have not seen a more earnest people." And then he observes:—"In every place we find labouring men most susceptible to religion." Thomas Taylor had made the same observation. These men knew more about the poor than did the "Northern Farmer" who said,

"Taäke my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad."

We cannot take his word for it.

After preaching about seven on Easter morning "with an uncommon degree of freedom," he "met the local preachers, several of whom appear to have caught the fashionable disease—desire for Independency. They were at first very warm, but at length agreed to act by the rules laid down in the Minutes of the Conference." A year later he had "a large congregation in the morning," and "at five the preaching house would not near contain the congregation. Afterwards I administered the Lord's Supper to 500 communicants." Between the two services he attended St. Mary's, where he heard the curate (Rev. Edward Burn) preach "an admirable sermon." On Monday he "met the Select Society, most of whom are perfected in love," and on Tuesday afternoon preached "at Quinton, in the new preaching house, and in the evening at Birmingham!" He appears to have remained in the town through the week, for on the following Sunday he preached in "the Church," which, as usual, was far too small to contain the congrega-

tion ! I am not aware that Wesley ever speaks of a Methodist preaching-place as "the Church" ; it is "the meeting house" or "the preaching house." The first erection for that purpose was in 1739, at Bristol, which (to quote Atmore), "in order to avoid the appearance of dissenting from the Church of England, was called the 'New Room.'" The strongest designation is "chapel," which is primarily an adjunct to a large church or cathedral ; and this fits Wesley's theoretical standpoint of adhesion to the Church of England. But let not Anglican advocates labour that point. Did the

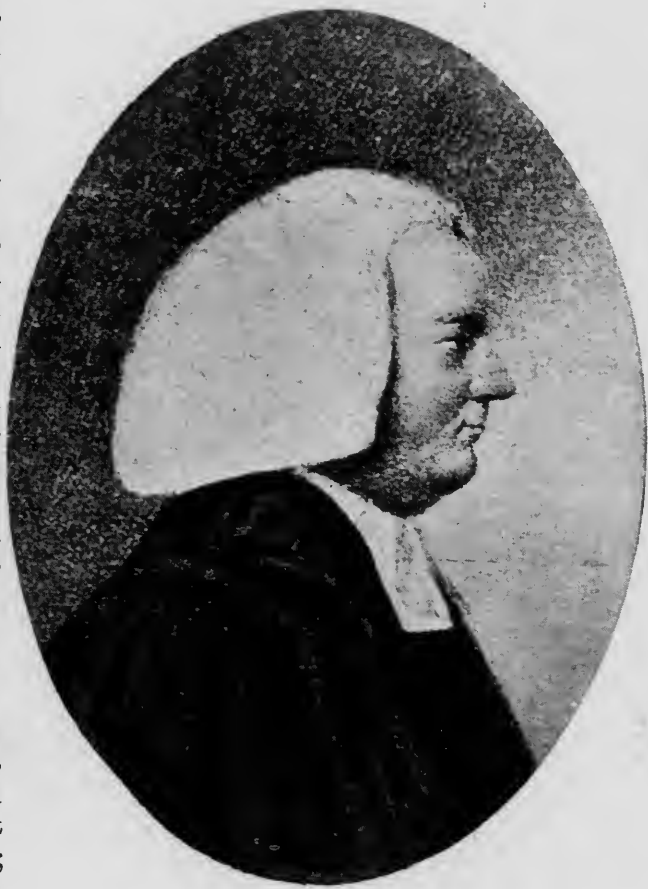


ST. MARY'S CHURCH.

(From a Photograph by Rev. W. H. Booth.)

Anglican Church hold the complementary view ? Moreover, we have just seen that Wesley, firmly believing himself a scriptural bishop (=superintendent or overseer), "as much as any man in England," had himself ordained Superintendents by the laying on of hands ; and we may remember Lord Mansfield's famous *dictum* on that transaction, "ordination was separation." Wesley's use of the word "church" must therefore be taken in the conventional sense. Which church, then, would it be ? Abundant evidence points to

St. Mary's. Its first vicar, John Riland, early in his career curate to his brother, the rector of Sutton Coldfield, in 1763 joined Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, a leader amongst the band of Evangelical clergymen in sympathy with Wesley. Wesley frequently preached in Venn's church during and after Riland's curacy, and both the vicar and curate are amongst those to whom Wesley addressed his famous letter in 1764 containing proposals on the subject of Christian union. Though the leanings of these clergymen in the Calvinistic controversy were towards the side of Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon, they, like their leaders, continued on terms of sympathy and friendship with Wesley and the Methodists. Edward Burn, then curate at St. Mary's and afterwards its vicar, when Riland succeeded to the family living at Sutton Coldfield, had been educated at Trevecca, the theological school founded by the Countess of Huntingdon. Here both sections of the Methodist leaders, the Arminian and the Calvinistic, worked in harmony for a time, and Joseph Benson, the Methodist commentator, was its first head master. After leaving Trevecca Edward Burn itinerated some years in the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Thus both vicar and curate knew the Methodist movement from the inside. St. Mary's was, too, the religious home of the "Church Methodists," who objected to Methodist services in church hours, and received the sacraments only at the hands of clergymen; and the Methodist dead rested in that spacious churchyard. We have, however, the direct evidence



REV. JOHN RILAND, FIRST VICAR OF ST. MARY'S.

of Miss Newey, of Anderton's Court, to whom reference has already been made. It was her grandfather, Jonathan Newey, who entertained Wesley in Anderton's Court on the visit we are now discussing, and, when a child, she had it repeatedly from his lips that Wesley held a band-meeting in the room on the first floor shewn in the illustration, after the curate's sermon, and afterwards preached there himself. What a day's work for an old man in his 83rd year! Preached at Cherry Street at, say 7 o'clock, attended St.

Mary's at 10, band meeting at, say 2, preached at St. Mary's at, probably 3 (the service being then in the afternoon), and at Cherry Street at 5, afterwards administering the Lord's Supper to 500!

In July of the following year, 1786, he opened "the new chapel in Deritend. To build one here was an act of mercy indeed, as the church would not contain a fifth, perhaps not a tenth of the inhabitants." The chapel thus referred to is that in Bradford Street, now worked by the Mission and was then but a small building standing far back from the road, the front being used as a graveyard. It was enlarged 80 years ago, (Joseph Entwistle, the Superintendent, laying the stone,) and brought to the front over the graveyard. A few years ago Mr. Lee, a local preacher and ex-steward of Belmont Row Circuit, being a builder, was called in to examine the condition of the old pillar pulpit, and found it resting on the arch of a

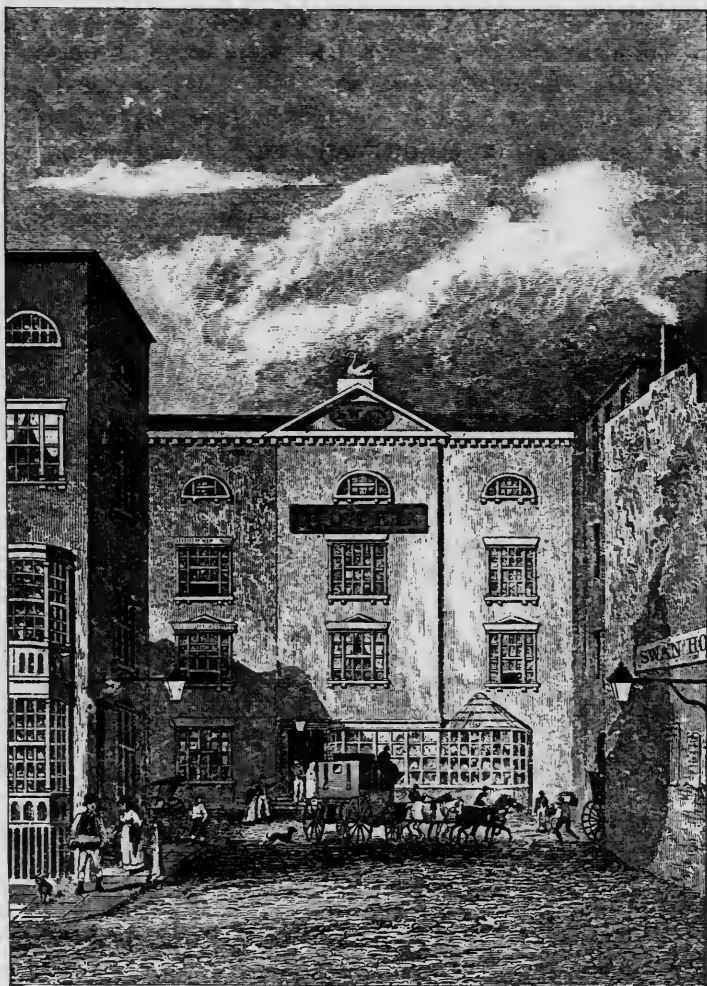


BRADFORD STREET CHAPEL, AS AT PRESENT.

vault. One's imagination is exercised to picture the scene if the arch had given way with Peter Mackenzie, a regular visitor, or some other animated heavy weight in the pulpit.

In March, 1787, Wesley was here three days, administering the sacrament to seven or eight hundred, and preaching in the evening, when "the house, as it was raining, contained half of those that would willingly have come in. Those that could get in found it an acceptable time." On Monday he "spent an agreeable hour with the Select Society. Many of them still enjoy the pure love of God, and the rest are earnestly panting after it; . . . and preached in the evening on 2 Cor. v. 19." In the following August his journey to Birmingham is eventful. Returning from the Manchester Conference, he chartered the entire coach for himself and thirteen others, six inside and eight out, leaving at midnight. But with such a body of divinity "the coach could not bear the burden, and

broke down about three in the morning." They "patched it together," and got another at Congleton. In an hour or two this broke down too, "and one of the horses was so thoroughly tired he could hardly set one foot before the other." It took nineteen hours (instead of seventeen) to reach Birmingham, and, "finding a large congregation waiting, I stepped out of the coach into the house, and began preaching without delay . . . and found no more weariness when I had done than if I had rested all day."



SWAN HOTEL, WHERE WESLEY MAY BE SUPPOSED TO HAVE ARRIVED AND LEFT BY COACH, AND PUT UP HIS OWN CHAISE.

(Lent by the publishers of "*The Making of Birmingham.*")

Next morning he set out before five for Gloucester, where he arrived at five in the afternoon, and preached at seven. At 2 a.m. he is away again, travelling till four in the afternoon, and preaching at Salisbury in the evening. And this for an old man of 84! A few years earlier Charles Wesley had said "My brother . . . is an astonishing youth, and may be saluted, like the Eastern monarchs, 'O king, live for ever!'" What would he have said to the journey thus sketched!

Aris's Gazette of Monday, March 17th, 1788, a journal which always spoke of Wesley with a respect that deepened into veneration as the years advanced, heralds his next visit with the editorial note :— "It is expected that the Rev. Mr. John Westley will preach at the chapel in Cherry Street, on Saturday the 22nd inst., at half-past six o'clock in the evening, and on Sunday and Monday following." Wesley's own note is interesting :—"On Saturday evening we had a Sunday congregation at Birmingham. Here there is a glorious increase of the Work of God. The Society has risen to above eight hundred ; so that it is at present inferior to none in England, except those in London and Bristol." On Sunday "we were greatly straitened for room, many being obliged to go away ; but all that could squeeze in found it good to be there, for . . . the power of God was present to heal. And so it was on the two following days, particularly on Tuesday, while I explained 'Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?'" This text calls to mind Hutton's epigram, who in speaking of Wesley as "the chief priest [of the Methodists], whose extensive knowledge and unblemished manners gave us a tolerable picture of apostolic purity," adds, "he believed as if he were to be saved by faith, and laboured as if he were to be saved by works." In the following March he arrived on Friday, reserving Saturday as "a day of rest only (!) preaching morning and evening." On Sunday, March 22nd, he opened the house at the east-end "of the town." The "friendly rain" gave them "only a moderate congregation," but in the evening "heaps upon heaps were obliged to go away. How white are these fields unto the harvest!" The allusion is to Belmont Row chapel, then called Coleshill Street. In saying the east "end," Wesley was literally correct, for there was then scarcely a house beyond it. A map of the town of 1778, shews several houses in Prospect Row on the left, but none on the right beyond "A. B. house" About that period, Dr. Ash, the founder of the General Hospital, built a mansion a little further out, and Ashstead reduced to Ashted, is derived from his name. In 1791, Mr. John Brooke (whence Great "Brooke" Street), purchased the house and estate, converting the former into a church, consecrated in 1810 as St. James's, and the latter into wide streets, a crescent, for private residences. In the language of the day the suburb was "elegant," and its inhabitants "genteel." Carlyle, in 1824, called it a "fashionable suburb ;" the spacious streets and substantial houses still standing bear witness to the character of the district, and "Aristocratic Ashted" and "Beautiful Bloomsbury" were the alliterative epithets employed to describe it. Thus the site was unexceptionable, accessible alike to the labouring poor, and the "elegant" families of "gentility." The chapel at first seated about 600 or 700. It had no vestry or pulpit ; the floor was laid with quarries, and furnished only with benches, whilst the preacher spoke from a slightly elevated desk. This was in conformity with the early regulations as to chapel building, 1765-70, which included "Let there be no Chinese paling, and no tub pulpits, but a square projection with a long seat behind. Let there be no pews, and no backs to the seats, which should have aisles on each side and be parted in the middle by a rail running all along dividing the men from the women." Pews and the boarded floor came later. The mahogany pulpit of the old wine glass shape was part of the furniture of the chapel in Cherry

Street, but transferred to Belmont Row early in last century, and reduced in height to suit the smaller proportions of the chapel. The entrance was by two large doors opening direct into the chapel, and so remained till 1832, when the present portico and vestibule were added. But what are we to say



BELMONT ROW CHAPEL, AS AT PRESENT.
PREACHER'S HOUSE ON THE LEFT.

of this rapid multiplication of chapels, three in seven years, at the points of a scalene triangle whose sides are respectively five, six, and seven-eighths of a mile in length? Clearly the growth of the society required it. We have

seen 500 communicants in 1786, the year of the opening of Bradford Street chapel, to build which was "an act of mercy indeed;" 7 to 800 in 1787; above 800 members in 1788; the town extending in every direction. The necessity was unquestionable. But what of the finances? Alas! this is a sad story, which cannot be entered into now. Belmont Row chapel, including the preacher's house, cost, for example, £1,321 14s. 6d.; the cash subscriptions were only £315, and took three years to pay. The people, though full of zeal, were for the most part poor; they held the doctrine, more plausible then than now, that their descendants should carry some portion of the cost. This doctrine betrayed a certain incapacity for finance, an incapacity born of a deficient grade of financial training and lack of experience in the matter of chapel building. These were but the beginnings; they had as yet no standard of experience, no guide posts to indicate whither this policy led and whither that. The terrible lessons resulting from allowing debts to drift and accumulate had not yet been learnt, and there was no Chapel Committee or other controlling authority to exercise effective check. But where would Methodism have been without the daring audacity, the invincible faith, the burning zeal of our forefathers? How could these early Methodists have felt their feet if fettered by the cool, calculating but salutary caution of to-day? It is safe to say these three chapels would not then have been built, and that Methodism would not have had the start it had, nor therefore the means of spiritual growth, and its position and strength would not have been what we enjoy to-day.

But to return to our narrative. *Aris's Gazette*, of Monday, March 15, 1790, again announces Wesley's forthcoming visit:—"The Rev. and venerable Mr. Wesley is now making his annual visit to his congregations in this part of the country. On Thursday next he is expected to preach at Stourport, and on Friday at the Meeting house in Cherry Street in this town." He preached at Quinton on his way, at 11 on Friday morning, where he found a congregation waiting for him, and then went on to Birmingham, which he thinks is "thrice as large as when I saw it fifty years ago." His estimate is accurate, for the records give the population in 1741 as 24,660, and in 1791 as 73,653. This is his last visit; the old man is now nearly 87, and within a year of his death. Let us quote his entry in full:—"The congregation in the evening [Friday] were well squeezed together, and most of them got in. The behaviour of the rich and poor is such as does honour to their profession, so decent, so serious, so devout, from the beginning to the end! It was the same the next evening. Sunday, the prayers began at the new house [Belmont Row] about half an hour after ten. It is a little larger than the new house at Brompton, and admirably well constructed. But several hundreds, I suppose, could not get in. I think all who did found that God was there. The great house [Cherry Street] likewise in the evening utterly insufficient to contain the congregation. But God is able to supply this want also; and His time is best."

In Macdonald's "Life of Joseph Benson," who was then in the circuit, we have an interesting note of this visit. Accompanied by a lay brother, John Walker, Benson rode out to Stourport to meet Wesley. To him the exciting crowds were distracting; but not so to Wesley, who "was no more hurried nor dissipated in the midst of crowds than when

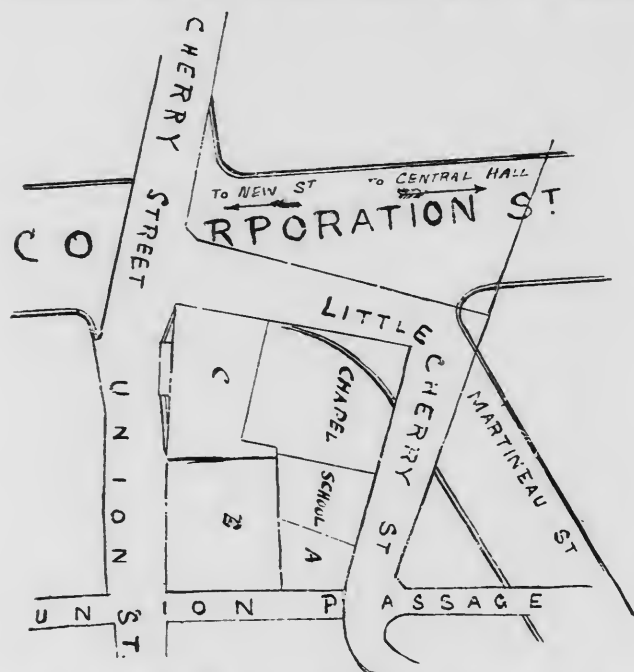
with Thomas Jones and John Holmes were also on the first trust of Belmont Row. William Parkes is a family name still remembered by the elders of Methodism on the Hockley side of the town. From him descends the venerable Rev. James Parkes, now of Bridgnorth, who has just completed the 62nd year of his ministry; and, what is more in touch with present-day Methodism, his daughter, who received her Society ticket from the hands of Wesley, married in 1793 James Heeley, from which union a splendid succession of notable Methodists has followed, not only in the male line but through the female side, touching the Pearts, Soutters, Holdsworths, Barnsleys, and others. Long may the bright succession run. But "Henry Eaden of Broad Marston, gentleman"—how comes he here to Birmingham? And where is Broad Marston? A vivid imagination might conjure up a very pretty fancy with that name. Let us see what is to be made of it. Broad Marston is near Evesham which is classic ground in early Methodism. For a short time it gave the first name to the circuit which comprehended and extended far north of Birmingham. The vicar of Quinton, near Evesham, was Samuel Taylor, who was a friend of the Wesleys and attended the first and other of the earliest Conferences. The neighbourhood was salted with Methodism. Evesham, Pebworth, Bengeworth and Broad Marston came under its immediate influence, and few country and unknown villages were more frequently visited by the Wesleys than these. In 1768 the vicar of Pebworth announced John Wesley to preach in the church on the following Friday, but the Squire forbade it. "So I preached about a mile from it at Broad Marston by the side of Mr. Eden's house. The congregation was exceeding large and remarkably attentive." In October, 1769, he was there again, when "the lovely family and the congregation from all parts made me full amends for my labour." Earlier in the same year, John Pawson, then in the circuit, "here first became acquainted with one of the most amiable families I have ever known, Mr. Eden's in Gloucestershire. It was a heaven upon earth to be there. They were so unreservedly devoted to God, so simple of heart, so lively and zealous in the service of a good Master that I could not but rejoice when I had the prospect of spending a day with them." Such a picture needs no comment. From the description in the Deed we may infer that Mr. Eden was a man of affluence; and we may think of Wesley, aware of the necessities and the poverty of his courageous followers in Birmingham, enlisting the active sympathy and support of his old friend at Broad Marston, with the result that his name stands in the Deed.

These, then, were the first Trustees of Cherry Street Chapel. Its accommodation was for about 1,000, and in its original form, which was as nearly square as possible, the pulpit or preaching platform stood with its back to where the schools afterwards stood, *i.e.* looking towards St Philip's Church.

In 1823, the freehold was purchased, and the chapel practically re-built and enlarged to seat about 1,400, during the superintendency of Joseph Entwistle, who records that during the re-building the congregation was accommodated on Sunday mornings at Cannon Street Baptist Chapel, and in the evenings at the New Meeting (Unitarian) in Moor Street. The latter, famous by its association with Dr. Priestley, had suffered in the riots of

1791, and forty years ago became a Roman Catholic Chapel. John Angell James speaks of the original erection and the enlargement in the same sentence, and somewhat equivocally says "Dr. Adam Clarke, on his way through Birmingham, had preached in the shell of the new building." I take this to refer to the enlargement; for the original opening was on July 7th, 1782, whereas it was in August that Adam Clarke passed through on his journey from his paternal home to meet Wesley, who had summoned him to Kingswood. Moreover, the opening of the chapel had been accomplished, for he "accompanied his friends to chapel in the evening and heard old Parson Greenwood discourse on 'I am in a strait betwixt two;'" and, he adds, speaking of himself in the third person, "had the preacher known the circumstances in which he himself was then found, he might safely have added him to the number . . . constrained to make that confession." During that visit Adam Clarke preached in a house near to Belmont Row, in the front wall of which a stone is built, inscribed

"A + B, 1764," which gives name to A.B. Row. The letters indicate the boundary of the parishes of Aston and Birmingham.



SITE OF CHERRY STREET CHAPEL, SHEWING ITS RELATION TO THE STREETS OF TO-DAY.

The old chapel is now no more. Together with the Baptist Chapel in Cannon Street, it was demolished in 1886, under the great street improvement scheme initiated by Mr. Chamberlain. The accompanying plan indicates its position at the junction of Corporation Street with Martineau Street. The blocks A and B still stand; but C, together with the chapel and the school are gone.

A century ago the old chapel witnessed the ministrations of some of the most notable men in Methodism. Perhaps none were more remarkable than Joseph Benson and Samuel Bradburn, though neither of them at the time of his appointment here had reached his zenith. Benson was

The prime mover in the enlargement was Rev. Henry Taft, M.D., who was second minister in the circuit in 1822-3, with the pastorate of Cherry Street, the superintendent living in the house adjoining Belmont Row Chapel. Dr. Taft died in 1824, and was buried near the pulpit. A memorial tablet was erected in the Communion, and is now in the Morning Chapel of the Central Hall.

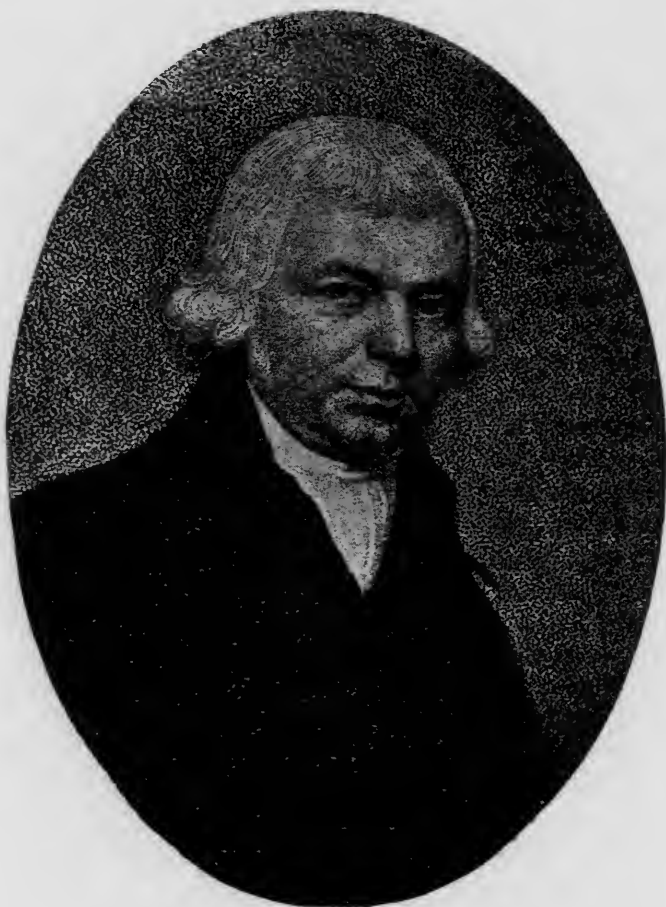
ever an unsparing and prodigious worker. Whilst here he had much affliction, personal and family, "sometimes (he says) racked and tortured all night without intermission," and for a long period also he suffered from sleeplessness. Yet he generally preached three and sometimes four times on a Sunday, met classes, and discharged other duties. His preaching, having, as Dr. Bunting testified, "fewer faults and more excellencies than ordinarily fall to the lot of one servant of Christ, however gifted," was a combination of rich expository power, as became the scholar he was, with powerful argument and searching appeals of irresistible force. Its effect was often overwhelming. "His eloquence shook his audiences as the storm shakes the forest." But what would it have been had he possessed the outward and visible gifts which strike the imagination of the listener? Short in stature, of an almost emaciated frame, serious and devout in manner, little attentive to the graces and elegances of style, having a thin piping voice, which, when raised, acquired (as Dr. Adam Clarke expressed it) "a squeaking pitch," he lacked those natural endowments. Bradburn, on the other hand, was majestic in appearance, exuberant in imagination, redundant in humour, having a voice clear and mellow, capable of modulation from the most soothing accents to the startling lightning flash or the terrible thunder peal; whilst the descriptions of his eloquence would to-day sound like the language of rhodomontade, were they not from such unim-



JOSEPH BENSON.

peachable witnesses as Keeling, Clarke, Watson, Bunting, and Jackson; and "The Demosthenes of Methodism" became his universal designation. Yet, great as he himself was, he hesitates not to say to Benson in striking and daring hyperbole, "If you, with your capabilities as a preacher, had a voice like mine, God himself could scarcely save you." Both these great preachers had their bad times, however; and a remark of Benson's to Bradburn is worth quoting. After one such time, the latter had said he felt confident of a good time when he ascended the pulpit stairs, but came down

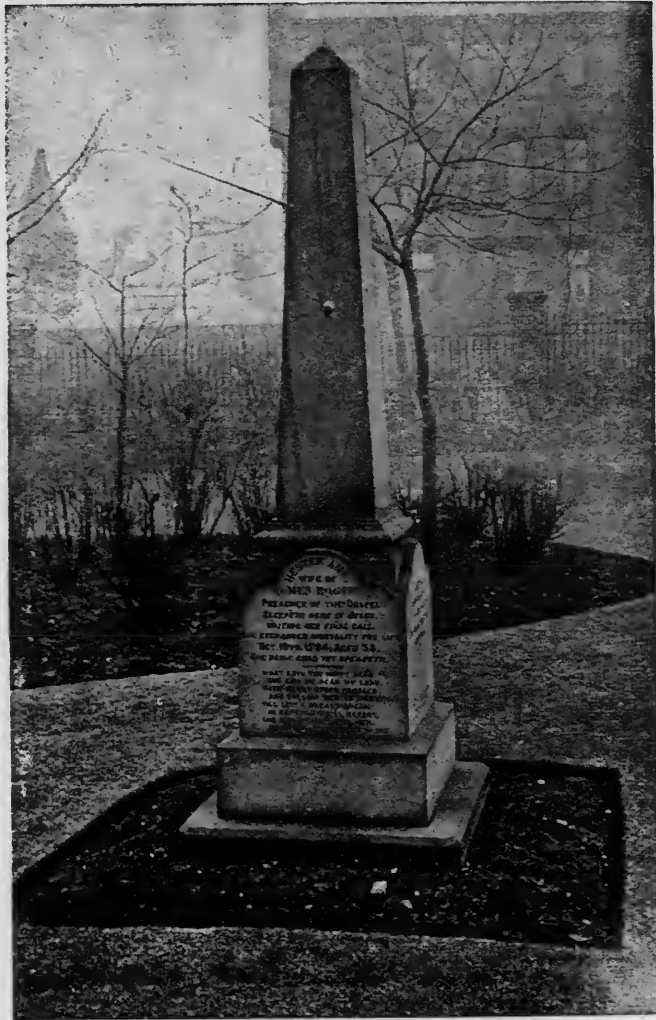
miserably disappointed ; to which Benson replied, "If you had gone up as you came down, you would have come down as you went up." Benson, whilst in Birmingham, engaged in controversy with Dr. Priestley, concerning which, the estimate of Dr. Smith, the historian of Methodism, is valuable. "All the erudite sophistries of that able writer were fully met ; he was followed into the deepest recesses of philosophy or the most profound subtleties of metaphysics, and everywhere the truth of God was shewn to be paramount over the vain imaginations of man."



SAMUEL BRADBURN.

The mention of Priestley recalls his opinion of Methodism, which, in his letter to Burke, he commends as not only "christianizing," but "civilizing that part of the community which is below the notice of your dignified clergy." Benson was once in imminent peril of his life by being thrown from his horse when in Birmingham ; the horse taking fright trod upon and dragged him. He was stunned and bruised, and his upper and under coats were torn to pieces. On his happy escape he says, "Surely this hath God wrought !"

James Rogers, who lived in Wesley's house till the time of his death, and who, with his wife, the perhaps more widely known Hester Ann Rogers, appears in Claxton's picture of Wesley's death-bed, was here in 1793-4. His wife, whose "Spiritual Letters" were widely read by past generations of Methodists, died in the house attached to Belmont Row Chapel, and was buried in St. Mary's Churchyard. The obelisk over her grave, near the principal entrance, was restored in 1883, and when the graveyard was levelled, turfed and asphalted some years ago, hers was one of the few memorials left *in situ*.



HESTER ANN ROGERS'S MEMORIAL IN
ST. MARY'S CHURCHYARD.

Almost immediately after Wesley's death agitation commenced concerning the ecclesiastical position of Methodism. A circular was issued from Hull urging "continuance in connexion with the Church of England." It declined

to have the sacraments administered by the Methodist preachers, or to have preaching in the Methodist chapels during church hours, and predicted that those who differed would dwindle away to a dull, dry separate party. Similar, but more decided resolutions were adopted in Birmingham, under the inspiration of Benson, which were met by a circular letter from Mr. Julius Hardy, one of the leaders, who on behalf of himself and others protested against those resolutions, and deplored the agitation thus begun. The trouble grew throughout the Connexion. Appeal was made to Conference

1798.	Managers Feb	£	5	3
Oct 31	To Birmingham	19	1	
	To Wadnesbury	3	12	
	To Darlaston	4	10	
	To Walsall	5	1	
	To Oldbury	1	7	
	To Bromwich	19	6	
	To Horeely Heath	4	0	
	To Wilkinson's Works	14		
	To Burslem	4	9	
	To Ganton	2	7	
	To Hill	5		
	To Handsworth	6		
	To Extra Collection Birmingham	2	11	
	Balance in hand	14	11	3
		55	17	3

A PAGE OF RECEIPTS IN THE CIRCUIT ACCOUNT
BOOK OF 1798.

THE NAMES OF THE PLACES ARE IN THE WRITING OF SAMUEL BRADBURN.

in 1794 for permission to have the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered in the chapels. This was granted to several places in each of about 40 of the 95 English circuits. In others it was left to the discretion of the superintendent. Birmingham was one of the latter, and James Rogers was superintendent. We do not know his line of action, but it is on record that in his time twelve leaders and sixty members withdrew, and opened a chapel in Newhall Street, which had been occupied by

the Swedenborgians, choosing for their minister a man who had been expelled at a previous Conference. Another account says some of the irreconcilable adherents to the Old Plan had a preaching room near Ladywell Passage, Smallbrook Street. The Quinton Society "Church Methodists" to a man, separated themselves bodily, and their pulpit was supplied in turn by Messrs. Whitehouse (grandfather of Mr. W. E. Whitehouse of the Wesley Circuit), Bourne and Longmore. These were not satisfied with the Plan of Pacification, the first Article of which provides that "The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall not be administered in any chapel, except the majority of the Trustees . . . on the one hand,



WILLIAM THOMPSON.

PRESIDENT OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE AFTER WESLEY'S DEATH.¹

and the stewards and leaders . . . on the other hand allow of it;" and even then they were to state in writing to the Conference their conviction that no separation would be created thereby. The Quinton Society maintained their separation more than thirty years. Rogers, too, with Moore, Mather, Pawson, Thomas Taylor and Bradburn, all of whom are associated with Birmingham, formed part of the conclave which for better secrecy met at Lichfield to discuss the situation and devise a remedy. Their scheme, however, was abortive.

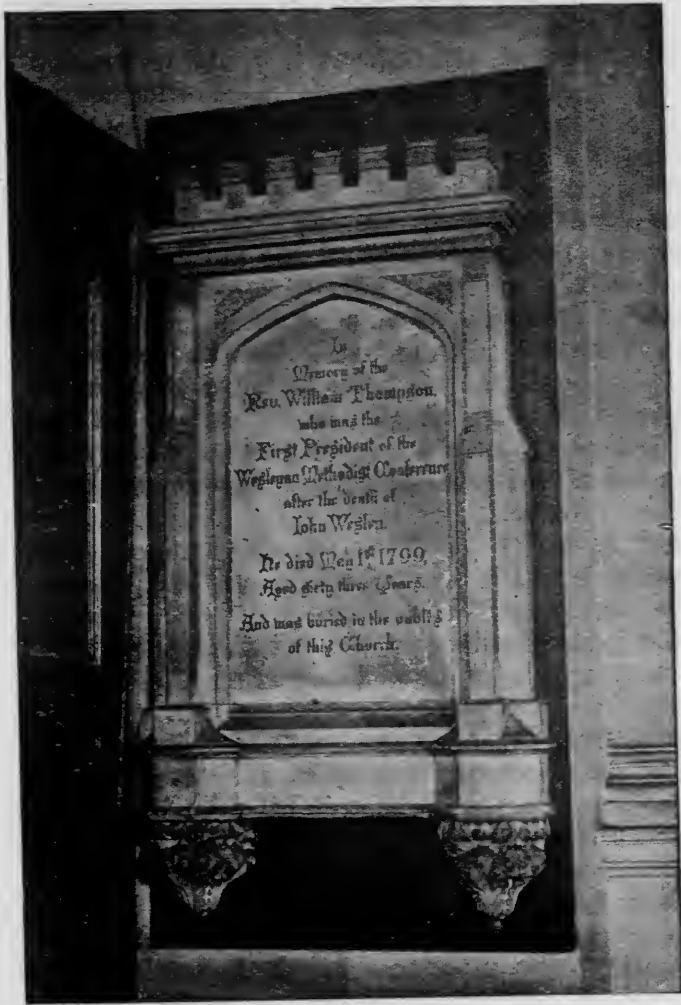
William Thompson followed Rogers, and he has the distinction of being President of the first Conference after the death of Wesley. In those days

of stress and strife much depended on who was at the helm. Thompson was statesmanlike, sagacious and judicious, "of remarkably strong sense," (says Atmore), "a fertile genius, a clear understanding and a sound judgment . . . supposed by many to be one of the closest reasoners and most able speakers that ever sat in the Methodist Conference." He took an influential part in settling the great questions that disturbed the Connexion. It was he who recommended the plan adopted by the Conference of 1791, of dividing the Connexion into districts, which gave cohesion to the circuits, and powers to the districts then formed to manage internal affairs, and to meet cases of emergency that might arise between one Conference and the next, which during Wesley's lifetime had been decided by himself. The first Chairman of the Birmingham district was Jeremiah Brettell, who had entered the itinerancy from Birmingham. It was Thompson, too, who devised and drafted the Plan of Pacification in 1795, which was accepted as a settlement of the disputes concerning the administration of the Sacraments. His own hand being palsied, Jonathan Edmondson, his colleague at that time, acted as his amanuensis. Thompson's last appointment was to Manchester in 1798; but after 42 years of hard toil he retired to Birmingham in the following April. On March 10th, 1797, during his residence here, his eldest daughter had married at St. Martin's Church, Thomas Lacey, a gilt toy maker in Snow Hill, whose name appears as one of the first contributors to the Belmont Row building fund. The marriage is witnessed by William Thompson's bold and clear, but then very palsied, hand, and by John and Elizabeth Walker. It was probably at Walker's house that he closed his earthly career. He was a widower, and credible tradition states that he lived with an old couple near the junction of Loveday Street and Bath Street, where, for many years after the venerated man's death, his wig and hat remained hanging in the chimney nook. This note of locality exactly fits the fact that John Walker was a coal merchant in Bath Street. Bath Street, too, would be easy of access to his married daughter in Snow Hill, who, with her husband, ministered to the dying man's last needs. Short was his stay here, for after extreme sufferings, he died on May 1st, 1799, and his body being laid before the pulpit in Cherry Street Chapel, Bradburn preached to a crowded congregation from "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" The body was interred in St. Mary's Church. The pall was borne by the preachers of the district, and the funeral was attended by the largest number of people ever seen on such an occasion in Birmingham.

A plain tablet was erected to his memory on the outer wall of the Church, but prior to the Birmingham Conference of 1879, the Vicar, the late Rev. I. Casebow Barrett, M.A., called attention to its decaying condition. The result was a beautiful marble tablet affixed to the east end of

the nave on the north side of the pillar supporting the chancel arch ; the inscription, an amplification of the original, reads :—

In
Memory of the
Rev. William Thompson,
Who was the
First President of the
Wesleyan Methodist Conference
After the death of
John Wesley.
He died May 1st, 1799,
Aged Sixty-three years,
And was buried in the Vaults
of this Church.



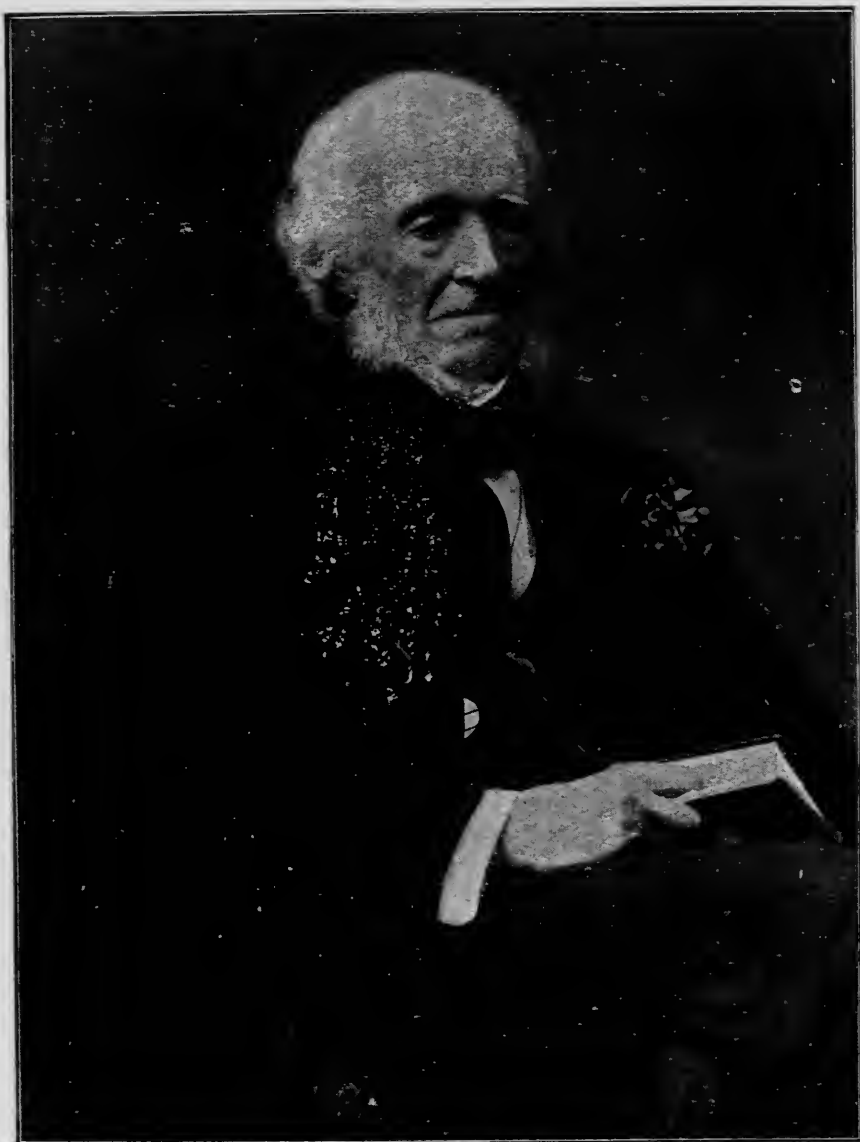
WILLIAM THOMPSON'S MEMORIAL TABLET IN
ST. MARY'S CHURCH.

There was a curious uncertainty as to his age. The original tablet gave it as 66 years: Thompson believed himself to have been younger; but, according to Atmore, family documents established it as 66.

To these distinguished men we might add Henry Moore, the friend, executor, and biographer of Wesley, who was appointed here twice, filling the Presidential chair on the first occasion; Richard Reece, Thomas Taylor, Joseph Taylor, Jonathan Edmondson, Joseph Entwistle (in whose term the enlargement of Cherry Street Chapel was completed, and that of Bradford Street commenced)—all of them Presidents in their time. S. D. Waddy and Joseph Fowler, famous fathers of famous sons, were here too. The circuit made repeated efforts to secure the appointment of Richard Watson. He accepted the invitation for 1829, but “expressed a wish, if the friends were agreeable, to have the house situated in Frederick Street, now occupied by Mr. Richard Green”; and a notice at a special Quarterly meeting that the house “be forthwith taken” was carried. But at Conference the special necessities of the City Road circuit created a difficulty. Mr. Watson declared in Conference, “My strong prejudices are in favour of Birmingham as a sphere of usefulness, and I think it would be wrong to interfere with my engagement.” After a long debate Mr. Fowler demanded a vote, the first that had ever been taken on a question of stations, with the result that Watson was lost to Birmingham by 145 votes to 144. The circuit never got Richard Watson; in 1833 he was beyond the region of circuit invitations. But there was almost a domestic tragedy about that house. An infant was born there in the previous June; and the family, and especially the poor mother with her babe of but a few weeks old, had to submit to all the inconveniences of uprooting from a charming home and arranging and settling into another. What a risk to that mother and that child! Happily, he lives to tell the tale; but he never passes the house without a pang, as he thinks of what his mother endured in the circumstances, and his own casting forth “to make way for another Richard who never came”; for he became one of our most honoured ministers and Didsbury Governors, the Rev. Richard Green.

This record of early Methodism in Birmingham would be incomplete without a reference to a historic visit of one of the greatest men who ever adorned its ministry, Dr. Adam Clarke. It was in connection with the founding of the local Auxiliary of the Missionary Society in 1815. The Society had not long been formed, and Adam Clarke was one of the most powerful and earnest apostles of the movement. *Aris's Gazette* of Monday, June 19th, 1815, the day after the battle of Waterloo, announced services “to form a Society for the purpose of supporting these important and extensive Missions; Dr Clarke, then in his second Presidency, to preach at Belmont Row in the morning, and Robert Newton in the evening, the latter also preaching at Cherry Street in the morning of the following Sunday, 25th. N.B.—Dr. Adam Clarke will preach only once on the Sabbath” On the succeeding Monday these preachers reverse the pulpits at 7 p.m. The *Gazette* of Monday, 26th, announces Dr. Clarke at Cherry Street at 10 a.m. of that day, and the public meeting in the same chapel at 2 p.m., at which “the seats in the gallery will be reserved for the ladies.” The report in a subsequent issue is limited to a few lines:—Dr. Adam Clarke “was called to

the chair," and the congregations were large and enthusiastic. Among others appointed on the committee is a family name associated with this work through a long spell of years, Mr. James Heeley, the first and father of the Heeleys of Birmingham Methodism. It is interesting to note that his son Samuel was, at the first committee held in the following month, appointed Sub-secretary, and Francis, another son, a collector. In 1820

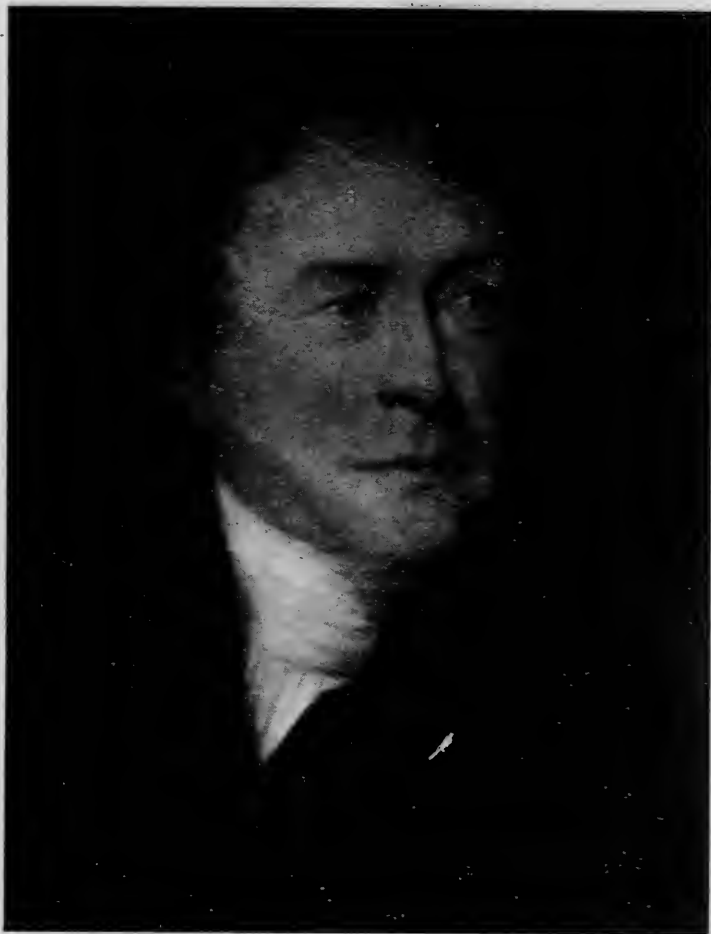


DR. MELSON.

James Heeley was appointed Sub-treasurer; in 1827, Francis Sub-secretary, in 1829, General Secretary, and in 1838, General Treasurer, an office he filled about 34 years. It was the firm of James Heeley and Son who struck the medals presented to the President and Secretary, and American representatives to the first Birmingham Conference, that of 1836, as a

memento of the occasion, Dr. Melson making the presentation speech ; and also the medal in 1839, which circulated through the Connexion, commemorative of the centenary of Methodism, the obverse bearing a portrait of Wesley, and the reverse a view of the Centenary Hall.

It would be pleasant to dwell on some of the names of laymen who have contributed to the making of Methodism in Birmingham, notably that of Mr. William Fiddian, father of late Rev. Samuel Fiddian, and grandfather of the Revs. Dr. Moulton, R. Green, and R. Peart ; but the records of



MR WILLIAM FIDDIAN

the early men are scanty, and later dates do not come in the design of the present sketch. There is, however, one illustrious name inseparably connected with Cherry Street, and known throughout the length and breadth of the Connexion, to omit a reference to which would be unpardonable—that of Dr. Melson. We have seen that Dr. Taft was the mainspring of the enlargement in 1824. His brother Zechariah, who was also a minister, married Mary Barritt. Famous in the matter of female preaching, she once preached before the Conference and won the “well done, Mary,” of

Adam Clarke ; but a greater "well done" is hers in being the means of the conversion of Robert Newton, Thomas Jackson, and William Dawson. Her niece—the daughter of her brother, John Barritt, one of Wesley's preachers—married another Methodist preacher, who entered the ministry in 1802, Robert Melson ; and their son, Dr. John Barritt Melson, became the most famous man in the history of Cherry Street Chapel. He joined the Society there in 1825, and except for residence at Cambridge, maintained an unbroken association with it for sixty-one years. It was fitting therefore that he, a preacher, born of preachers, should deliver the closing sermon.

His father was a hard-working Methodist preacher, a man of character and ability, who evidently looked for results from his ministry, temporal and spiritual ; for, after an entry recording the labours of a week "travelled so many miles, preached so many sermons, met so many classes, paid so many visits, and collected eight shillings," he adds "Good God, how these people value the gospel!"

The Doctor gave early evidence of scholarship at Woodhouse Grove, and, when thirteen, delivered on behalf of the school a Greek speech to the Conference at Leeds. He also appeared on the Conference platform in Birmingham in 1836, the first occasion of its assembling there, as the mouth-piece of the Methodists of the town in an address of congratulation, and presentation of a gold medal to the President, Dr. Bunting. At Cambridge he took a high degree in Science and Medicine. To Birmingham he brought his vast abilities. His scientific lectures were attended by the future Archbishop Benson and Bishop Westcott, who, a few years ago, declared he was "one of the great men who had made Birmingham what it is." In 1841 he was appointed to the Borough Bench, and was long its senior magistrate. He was one of the co-founders and first physicians of the Queen's Hospital, through which 30,000 patients pass annually, and for many years was at the front in all matters affecting his profession. He was a pioneer in scientific matters, and collaborated with Schonbein, the inventor of gun-cotton and discoverer of ozone, and with Faraday, who referred to him the question of electricity as a motive power. He introduced photography and telegraphy into Birmingham, the Directors of the London and North-Western Railway Company with their scientific expert, attending one of his demonstrations. A militant Protestant and anti-Unitarian, he publicly lectured and disputed in the Town Hall during many years ; and was one of the founders of the Evangelical Alliance, joined with Dr. Miller (the Rector) and the Rev. John Angell James, in stirring up opposition to the assumption of territorial titles by the Romish Bishops.

But it was in being a preacher of the gospel that he most gloried, and to that office he devoted his great intellectual and scholastic powers ; and a handsome and dignified presence, and the external gifts of oratory, contributed to render him one of the most acceptable and widely-known preachers in the Connexion. This passion possessed him forty-five years. He last preached in the winter of 1895-6, and the circumstances illustrate his devotion to the work, and determination of will. The engagement was at Leamington, a few miles from the home of his son, with whom he spent his last years.

Snow had fallen to an unheard-of depth, and a gale had swept it in drifts and blocked the roads. His son, coming home on Saturday evening, found him seated, topcoat and hat on, travelling rug across his knee, ready for the journey.

"I am waiting for the cab," said he.

"Cab? No cab can come to-night."

"Why not?"

"Because the roads are blocked."

"Then I shall walk!"

By-and-bye, however, the cab arrived, having come across fields and by circuitous ways to avoid the drifts. He got to Leamington at dead of night, and found all closed and gone to bed, and so went to a hotel. He preached, and, returning on Monday, was found to be very feeble. He declared, "I shall never preach again," and he never did. His last years were as a passing down a gentle declivity into the grave—no shock, no pain, only a quiet falling asleep, on May 31st, 1898, at the age of 87.

It may be interesting to add that the Central Halls, old and new, are not the first religious houses standing on the site. More than 600 years ago there was erected a great religious house of another order, with church, hospital, cemetery, outbuildings and grounds covering an area of about thirteen acres. It was richly endowed by the lord of Birmingham and others, the priest being bound to pray for the souls of the founders every day to the end of the world. Any bequest or endowment that may fall to the treasurer of the new Central Hall will, we may be sure, be devoted to much more useful and hopeful objects. The estate is supposed to have been bounded by Steelhouse Lane, Bull Street, Dale End, John Street, and Newton Street. The Priory, which gave name to the streets "Upper Priory" and "Lower Priory," was demolished more than three centuries ago on the dissolution of monasteries.

